HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY/HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

NORVELT AND PENN-CRAFT, PENNSYLVANIA

SUBSISTENCE-HOMESTEAD COMMUNITIES OF THE 1930S

U.S. Department
of the Interior
National Park Service
Cultural Resources

America's Industrial
Heritage Project

NORVELT AND PENN-CRAFT, PENNSYLVANIA

Subsistence-Homestead Communities of the 1930s

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Historic American Buildings Survey/
Historic American Engineering Record

America's Industrial Heritage Project

National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior
Washington, DC
1991

Other publications produced by HABS/HAER in conjunction with the America's Industrial Heritage Project:

Bennett, Lola M. The Company Towns of the Rockhill Iron and Coal Company: Robertsdale and Woodvale, Pennsylvania. 1990.

Fitzsimons, Gray, ed. Blair and Cambria County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites. 1990.

Heald, Sarah H., ed. Fayette County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites. 1990.

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Mulrooney, Margaret M. A Legacy of Coal: The Coal Company Towns of Southwestern Pennsylvania. 1989.

Shedd, Nancy. Huntingdon County: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites. ed. Sarah H. Heald. 1991.

Wallace, Kim E., ed. The Character of a Steel Mill City: Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. 1989.

Wallace, Kim E., et al. Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania. 1990.

Hoagland, Alison K., 1951-
Norvelt and Penn-Craft, Pennsylvania : subsistence-homestead communities of the 1930s / Alison K. Hoagland, Margaret M. Mulrooney.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.
1. Rural development--Pennsylvania--History--20th century--Case studies. 2. Rural development projects--Pennsylvania--Norvelt--History--20th century--Case studies. 3. Rural development projects--Pennsylvania--Penncraft--History--20th century--Case studies. 4. Planned communities--Pennsylvania--Norvelt--History--20th century--Case studies. 5. Planned communities--Pennsylvania--Penncraft--History--20th century--Case studies. 6. Cooperation--Pennsylvania--Norvelt--History--20th century--Case studies. 7. Cooperation--Pennsylvania--Penncraft--History--20th century--Case studies. I. Mulrooney, Margaret M., 1966- II. Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record. III. America's Industrial Heritage Project. IV. Title.
HN79.P43C64 1991
307.1'412'09748--dc20 91-31633
CIP

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Margaret M. Mulrooney, HABS historian, began the project in 1989. She visited the towns, interviewed residents, undertook research, and drafted most of Chapters 3 and 4. Alison K. Hoagland, HABS senior historian, picked up the project in 1991, again visiting the towns, undertaking additional research, and writing the remaining chapters. Isabel Yang, HABS architect, produced the architectural drawings, and David Ames of the University of Delaware took the large-format photographs in 1991.

The authors would especially like to thank the Norvelt and Penn-Craft residents who opened their houses and shared their impressions and experiences with the authors. Original homesteaders and later arrivals, all were proud of their towns, with an awareness of the communities' origins as subsistence homesteads. Their enthusiasm about their towns was contagious.

NOTE ON ILLUSTRATIONS

David Ames of the University of Delaware took the photographs in this publication in the summer of 1991; the negatives are in the collection of the Historic American Buildings Survey at the Library of Congress. Historic photographs of Norvelt and other government subsistence homesteads are from the Farm Security Administration collection in the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Historic photographs of Penn-Craft are from the American Friends Service Committee Archives in Philadelphia, PA.

Isabel Yang of the HABS/HAER staff delineated the maps and architectural drawings. Original architectural drawings of the houses at Norvelt are recorded on microfilm at the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (see bibliography for full citation). Yang traced a select number of these for clarity. These are not as-built drawings; it is safe to assume that owners made minor changes during construction, and that no house reflects these plans exactly, but the drawings illustrate the basic plans. At Penn-Craft, three major types of houses were measured. In drawing them, Yang deleted alterations (determined through owners' recollections and historic photographs) in order to produce prototypical drawings. As at Norvelt, owners made individual changes to the plans during construction.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The coal region of Westmoreland and Fayette counties in western Pennsylvania is located on the hilly terrain of the western slope of the Allegheny Mountains. The coal bed underneath the surface is complemented by a topsoil rich in lime and suitable for farming. Superceding an agricultural tradition begun in colonial times, the coal-mining industry developed in the late nineteenth century. Americans who had lived in Pennsylvania for generations were joined by more recent immigrants from Eastern Europe to extract bituminous coal needed to fuel America's industries. Farmland gave way to coal mines and coke ovens, and towns with regular rows of two-story frame dwellings were constructed by coal companies to house the growing work force.

When the coal industry faltered in the 1920s, western Pennsylvania--particularly Westmoreland and Fayette counties--was hard hit. As broad-reaching relief efforts, the New Deal-era communities of Norvelt and Penn-Craft were planned to provide a new way of life. Built as subsistence homesteads, the communities were designed to give each family a few acres of land to farm for their own consumption. Cooperative farms and industries were developed to provide employment. Physically, the new towns stood in stark contrast to the company towns. Using curvilinear streets, multiple house plans, and historic building traditions, Norvelt and Penn-Craft are conspicuous in the landscape as carefully planned communities.

Although built by very different organizations, the connections between the two towns are numerous. Norvelt, originally named Westmoreland Homesteads, was located in Westmoreland County just eight miles southeast of the county seat of Greensburg, and was built by the U.S. Division of Subsistence Homesteads in 1934-37. Just as Norvelt was nearing completion, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) began construction of Penn-Craft, eleven miles northwest of Uniontown, the seat of Fayette County. Clarence Pickett guided both endeavors, serving as an administrator of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads for about a year, and as secretary of the AFSC for thirty. David Day, on-site project manager for Norvelt until 1936, was then the project manager of Penn-Craft. The architect of Penn-Craft, William Macy Stanton, had worked for the government on another subsistence community, Cumberland Homesteads, in Tennessee. With such important personnel a part of both projects, the ideas and intentions were understandably similar.

Motives for establishing the two communities were the same, as well. As will be shown in Chapter 2, the idea of subsistence homesteads derived from back-to-the-land impulses coinciding with the need to provide relief to the unemployed. Realization of such an idealistic venture was difficult, especially in the context of government responsibility and changing public opinion. The planning and construction of Norvelt are addressed in Chapter 3, and of Penn-Craft in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 is a brief look at the relative success of these experimental communities.

Planning historian Marc Weiss has identified several aspects of new communities that were important to planners in the 1920s and '30s. Two issues key to the subsistence-homestead communities were environmental reform (improving physical living conditions) and social reform

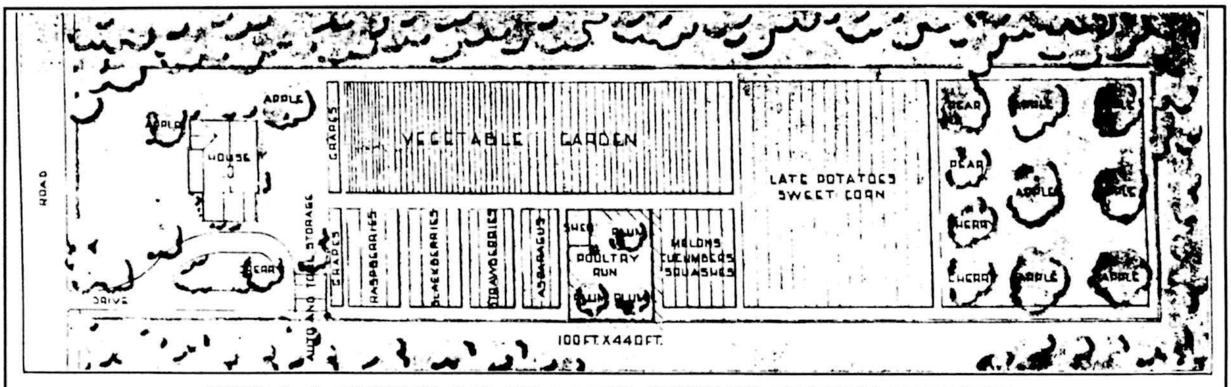
ROAD
APPLE
APPLE
HOUSE
PEAR
DRIVE
AUTO AND TOOL STORAGE
GRAPES
VEGETABLE GARDEN
GRAPES
RASPBERRIES
BLACKBERRIES
STRAWBERRIES
ASPARAGUS
SHED
PLUM
POULTRY RUN
PLUM
PLUM
MELONS
CUCUMBERS
SQUASHES
LATE POTATOES
SWEET CORN
PEAR
APPLE
PEAR
APPLE
APPLE
CHERRY
CHERRY
APPLE
APPLE
100 FT. X 440 FT.

FIGURE 1.—A SUGGESTED PLAN FOR A 1-ACRE SUBSISTENCE HOMESTEAD IN THE NORTH.

Beauty and utility are combined in the lay-out of this tract containing 1.01 acres. In the area north of the Mason-Dixon line and east of the one hundredth meridian this plan provides for a year's supply of vegetables, small fruits, poultry products, early and late potatoes, and most of the necessary tree fruits for a family of five. This is all that a man who is employed elsewhere during the growing season can care for properly by hand with the help of his family.

Figure 1 Proposed layout for a homestead plot. From Planning a Subsistence Homestead (1934), 4.

movement: church groups, southern agrarians, capitalist decentralists (advocating the decentralization of industry), distributist decentralists (who believed that distribution costs engendered by mass production outweighed its savings), supporters of a purely cooperative economy, disciples of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry David Thoreau, and city planners and housing experts.[4] With millions of persons thrown out of work and urban dwellers unable to provide basic foodstuffs for themselves, the ideal of the self-sufficient farmer reasserted itself. Unemployed urban dwellers moved back to the family farm, where at least they had a house and a means of feeding themselves.[5] Although rural dwellers were as likely as urbanites, if not more so, to be poor, the perception was that unemployment was an urban problem. The corollary was that rural life was the solution, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt shared this belief. As Rexford Tugwell, a member of Roosevelt's "brain trust," described it:

> To argue in such a situation for a return to the land made no sense; it would not make much more sense in the depression years to argue that the unemployed could be cared for in this way. But to Franklin it seemed axiomatic that in the country they would have shelter at least, and if they would work, something to eat. It was not that simple, as he was to learn at some cost. But he resisted the lesson for a long time.[6]

The contradiction inherent in sending more people to farm in a time of surplus agricultural produce was not lost on Milburn L. Wilson, who headed the government's subsistence-homestead program. Instead, Wilson advocated a program of "part-time" or subsistence farming--farming for a household's own consumption--linking a long tradition of "part-time" farming to the popularity of garden cities. Unlike the garden cities envisioned by Ebenezer Howard, the influential British urban reformer, American towns planned along the lines of the garden city did not have large farms.[7] Wilson's introduction of part-time farming into a planned community was an interesting twist. Like the planners of garden cities, however, Wilson counted on industry to provide employment, as well.

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[4] Russell Lord and Paul H. Johnstone, A Place on Earth: A Critical Appraisal of Subsistence Homesteads (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1942), 14.

[5] M. L. Wilson, "The Place of Subsistence Homesteads in our National Economy," Journal of Farm Economics 16 (January 1934): 74; U.S. Congress, Senate, Resettlement Administration Program: Letter from the Administrator of the Resettlement Administration (Sen. Doc. 213, 74th Cong., 2d sess., 12 May 1936), 1; U.S. Department of the Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, "General Information Concerning the Purposes and Policies of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads," (Circular No. 1, 15 November 1933), 10.

[6] Rexford G. Tugwell, The Democratic Roosevelt: A Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1957), 159.

Decentralizing industry was thus an important aspect of putting industrial workers back on the land. Recent innovations--including the automobile, paved roads, cheap electricity, and rapid communications--permitted industry to go where the people were. Wilson envisioned "a new type of community in which the industries can be in the center, and the families, instead of living on town lots, can live on blocks of land in subsistence homesteads for ten or fifteen miles in every direction."[8] The decentralization of industry was more of a hope than a current trend, however. The coke industry in Pennsylvania's Westmoreland and Fayette counties, for example, suffered when the steel-mill owners moved coking to the mill sites in Pittsburgh, rather than remaining at the mine sites in the counties.

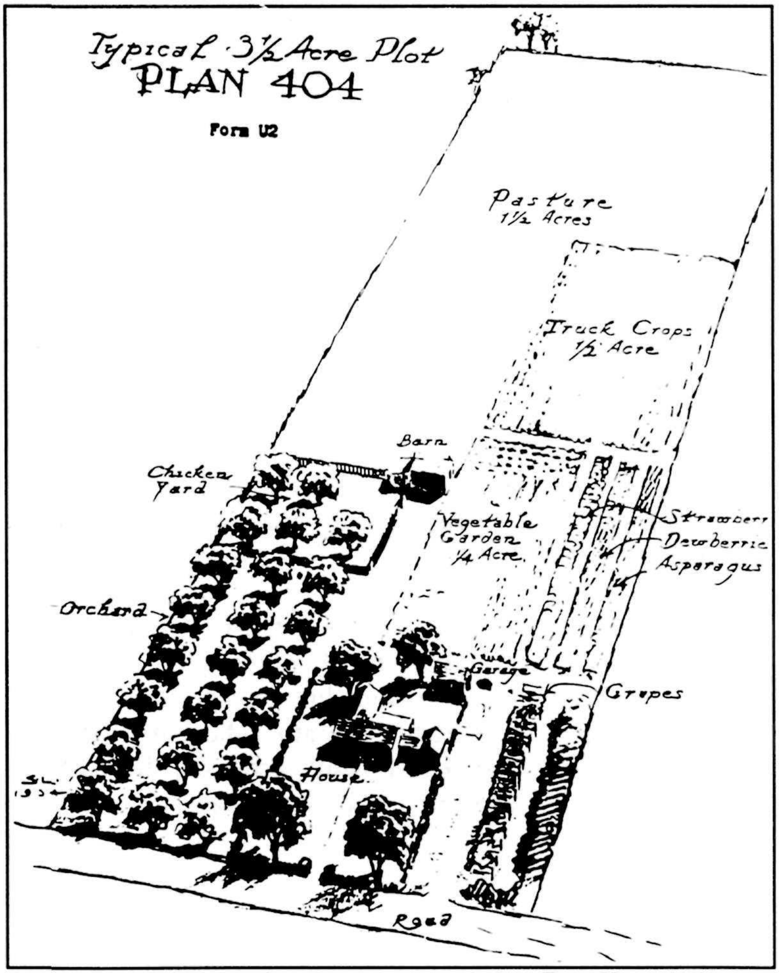

Figure 2 Proposed layout for a larger homestead plot. From Homestead Houses (1934), 65.

The subsistence-homestead movement was also fed by adjustments made because of the Depression. With the desire to spread wage-labor around, shorter working hours were instituted--thus freeing workers for part-time farming. The dislocations of the Depression also led to a new appreciation of community and home life--perhaps a nostalgic view of pre-industrial America. Wilson pointed to a "revolt against the crass materialism and shallowness of the jazz age" in favor of wholesome community living.[9] Home-ownership allowed these family values to flourish, cultivating feelings of security and pride. Increased homeownership, both a goal and a guarantee of the American way of life, had not been well served by the modern industrial system. As envisioned, the subsistence-homestead program would provide not only suburban-type houses, owned by their occupants, but also a community of like-minded families.

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[7] M. L. Wilson, "Rural Urban Life and the New Deal" (typescript, 1933), 2; Wilson, "The Place of Subsistence Homesteads," 75; Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of To-Morrow (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), 60-61.

[8] Wilson, 80.

PRIVATE RELIEF EFFORTS

The extreme poverty in the coal regions of the Allegheny Mountains inspired a number of private relief efforts throughout the region. In the coalfields of West Virginia, the Council of Social Agencies coordinated the activities of the American Legion, Salvation Army, and American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). The latter group had been founded in Philadelphia in 1917 to provide alternative service for Friends who were conscientious objectors to military service. During World War I, its members drove ambulances and worked on relief efforts in Europe, and after the war, aided in the rehabilitation of war-torn countries. In 1931 President Herbert Hoover asked the U.S. Children's Bureau to study the children of unemployed coal miners. Finding serious shortages of food and clothing, dilapidated housing, and rampant illness, the Children's Bureau approached the AFSC for assistance. Hoover offered $225,000, which the AFSC more than matched.[10] In the winter of 1931-32, the AFSC fed 40,000 children a day in thirty-eight coalfield counties.[11] Communities in West Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois and Pennsylvania were all beneficiaries of this effort.

The next winter, the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation offered relief funds, but several counties asked the AFSC to administer them. Beyond immediate relief, the AFSC undertook rehabilitation programs, which included the Mountaineer Craftsmen's Cooperative Association, formed to produce hand-crafted furniture, in West Virginia. The AFSC also experimented with subsistence gardens and started a farm-colony project in West Virginia. Health programs, stressing sanitary improvement, and emergency medical aid were also provided by the AFSC.[12]

By 1934, the AFSC devoted much of its energies toward assisting the government's subsistence-homestead program. For example, fifty-five volunteers participated in a summer work camp, constructing a water line and providing social work at Westmoreland Homesteads. The AFSC also established cooperative shops at several subsistence homesteads.[13] Although fully supportive of the government's program, the AFSC was reluctant to undertake the large-scale development of subsistence homesteads itself.

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[9] Wilson, 79, 81; Circular No. 1, 3.

[10] Stephen Edward Haid, "Arthurdale: An Experiment in Community Planning, 1933-1947" (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1975), 6; Pickett, 21. Hoover himself was a Quaker. The relief efforts of the AFSC were compatible with his philosophy of volunteerism and self-help, not direct government programs.

[11] AFSC, Annual Report 1931-32: 15.

[12] AFSC, Annual Report 1931-32: 15, 17; 1933: 16-17; 1934-35: 14.

[13] AFSC, Annual Report 1934-35: 15, 17.

GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT

The administration of the subsistence-homestead program--the only New Deal program devoted exlcusively to community building--was the responsibility of several New Deal agencies.[14] Beginning as the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, an agency of the Department of Interior, the program moved to the Resettlement Administration when it was formed as an independent agency in 1935. Two years later, the homestead program moved to the Department of Agriculture and became part of the Farm Security Administration. With each move, subsistence homesteads received less support, reflecting shifting sentiment of Congress and the public.

The precedent for federal development of communities had been established during World War I by the U.S. Shipping Board,[15] which had developed fifty-three shipyard-workers' communities. As the government's involvement in the shipyard-workers' communities was intended to be temporary, it sold off the houses soon after the war. In this housing venture, the government struggled to provide low-cost yet attractive housing and to be a model for private-industry efforts--issues that would reappear in the New Deal program.

The National Industrial Recovery Act, passed in May 1933, authorized $25 million to be spent on subsistence homesteads. Section 208 of the public works program (Title II) was not specific:

> To provide for aiding in the redistribution of the overbalance of population in industrial centers $25,000,000 is hereby made available . . . for making loans for and otherwise aiding in the purchase of subsistence homesteads.[16]

Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of Interior, appointed Milburn L. Wilson to the post of director of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. Wilson hired Clarence E. Pickett, executive secretary of the AFSC, as his assistant, with special responsibility for homesteads in mining communities. Wilson identified three major categories of communities to be created by the subsistence homestead program:

> (1) Workers' garden homesteads near small industrial centers in which small industries are located and to which further decentralization is likely to take place; (2) Workers' garden homesteads near large industrial centers, usually of heavy industries not likely to decentralize; (3) Projects for rehabilitation of

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[14] Paul K. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 7.

[15] Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, A History of Urban America, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), 269.

[16] Circular No. 1, 1.

"stranded" industrial population groups, particularly bituminous coal miners.[17]

These three categories were realized in about 100 subsistence homesteads developed by the government. Of these, only four were built to house "stranded" miners. The "stranded" bituminous coal miners were estimated to number at least 200,000 persons, who, the government claimed, "have little or no prospect of future employment." In some cases this was due to changing technology, but unemployment also resulted from the exhaustion of the resource.[18] The mines closed, and were not expected to reopen.

As envisioned in the Division of Subsistence Homesteads' Circular No. 1, the communities would have between twenty-five and 100 homesteads, each with one to five acres for subsistence farming "for the household use of the family and not for sale in the market." Home and small industries were encouraged to provide clothing and cash incomes, and the homesteaders would acquire their plots on long-term purchase contracts.[19]

Initially the government intended that the homesteads be constructed by the homesteaders themselves. Circular No. 1 outlined the features of this "self-help" program:

> Prospective homesteaders will insofar as possible perform, under competent supervision, the various constructional and other activities connected with preparing and improving their homesteads for occupancy and operation. It is the policy of the Division to encourage the fullest possible use of the homesteader's labor on his own homestead. His otherwise unemployed labor will thus be advantageously utilized to establish a substantial equity in his home and to reduce materially the financial burden upon his limited resources.[20]

The division's Bulletin No. 1, issued a year later, however, contained no mention of "self-help" construction, indicating a change in policy. Only four homestead communities, including Norvelt, used homesteaders' labor, paying for it partly in cash and partly with credits toward the purchase price.[21] More often, the homesteaders were hired as Public Works Administration relief labor. Federal wage-rate and working-hour provisions, as well as hiring restrictions,

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[17] Circular No. 1, 7-8. In the circular, he identified two additional groups: "(4) Projects for reorganization of disorganized rural communities, and for elimination of rural slums on lands submarginal for agriculture; (5) Movement of population, largely farm families, from submarginal dry-farming lands in the West, to unoccupied farms on existing Federal reclamation projects, to be done in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation." These two categories were soon shifted to the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and did not form part of the subsistence homesteads program. "Subsistence Homesteads for Industrial and Rural Workers at the End of 1934," Monthly Labor Review 40 (January 1935): 21.

[18] Circular No. 1, 2.

[19] Circular No. 1, 8.

[20] Circular No. 1, 11.

[21] Three were stranded-miners' communities: Cumberland Homesteads, TN; Tygart Valley, WV; and Norvelt. Memorandum, Comptroller-General to Administrator, Resettlement Administration, 8 November 1935, Box 29, Record Group 207, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC. The fourth was a project in Dayton, Ohio. Conkin, 114.

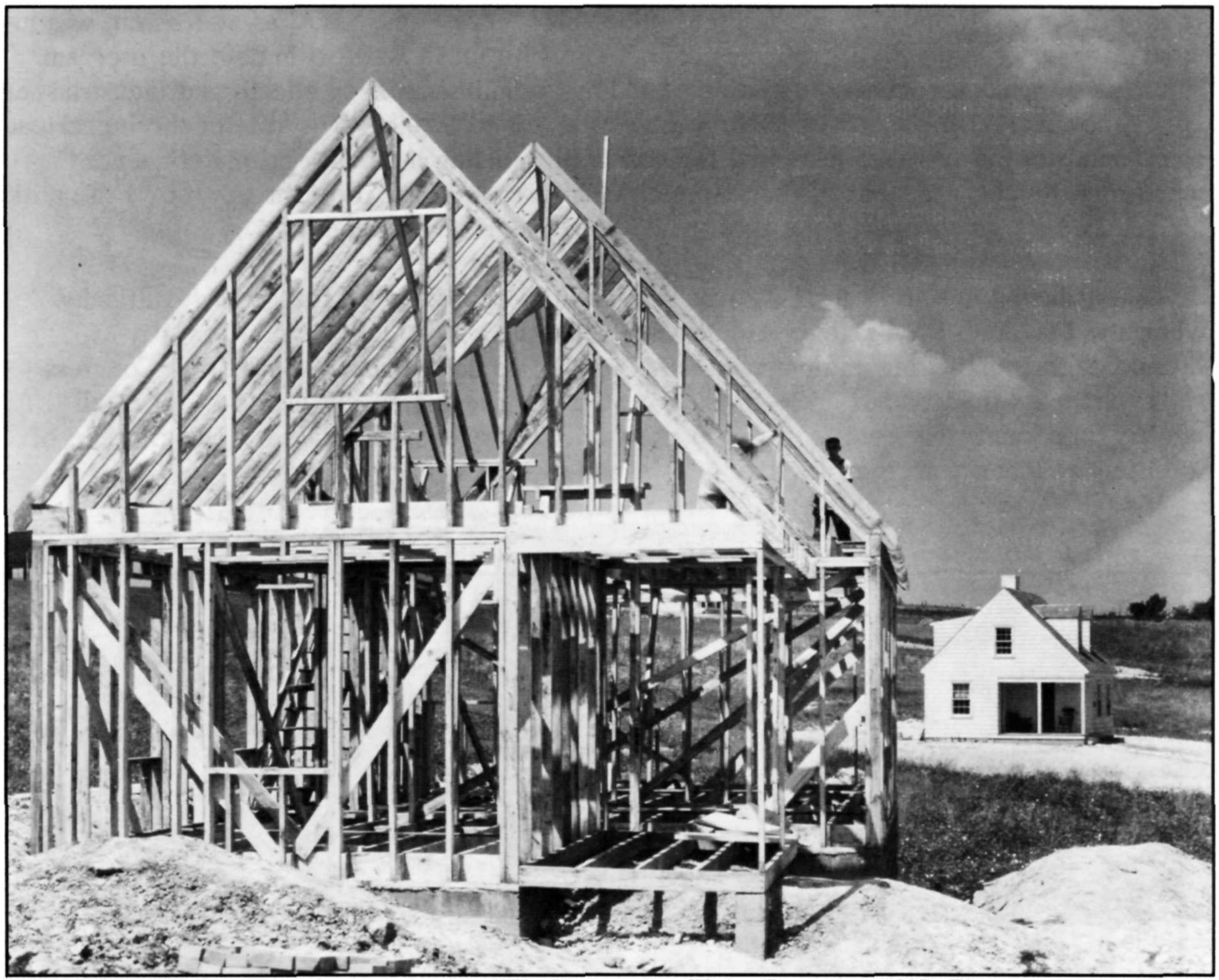

Figure 3 House under construction at Arthurdale, WV. Photographer: Walker Evans (June 1935), FSA.

prevailed, causing construction costs to rise by one-third, according to one estimate.[22]

The first homestead for stranded coal miners was Arthurdale, West Virginia, constructed near Reedsville, in the same region where the AFSC had been so active. Often cited as a model, and receiving Eleanor Roosevelt's personal attention, the 165 units at Arthurdale were also the most expensive of the entire program, averaging more than $16,000 per unit. In December 1933, the division announced construction of a second West Virginia project, Tygart Valley, near Elkins, for which 270 units were planned (195 were built). In January 1934, the last two stranded-miners' communities were announced. Cumberland Homesteads, near Crossville, Tennessee, was the largest, with plans for 350 units (262 were built). Westmoreland Homesteads--later named Norvelt--near Greensburg, Pennsylvania, would have 250 units. Ultimately 254 were built here, at a unit cost of almost $10,000.[23]

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[22] Lord and Johnstone, 51.

[23] Conkin, 332; "Subsistence Homesteads, 1934," 22.

The average unit cost in the ninety-nine subsistence homesteads, as at Norvelt, was just under $10,000[24]--hardly an attractive price to those who might want to imitate the program. These costs included community land and buildings, administrative overhead, and industrial seed money, however; construction of each house was closer to $2,000. The role of the homesteads as a demonstration program increased the cost, with building methods and materials not necessarily the cheapest. At the same time, the high cost of the program galvanized the critics and reduced the likelihood of the subsistence homesteads being duplicated.

Attracting industries to these new communities proved to be the greatest difficulty. When the Division of Subsistence Homesteads attempted to establish a new industry at Arthurdale, manufacturing equipment for the post-office department, members of Congress whose districts would be adversely affected protested. Fearing government control of all industry, opponents managed to stop the proposed factory at Arthurdale.[25] The Division of Subsistence Homesteads then tried to lure industry with language such as:

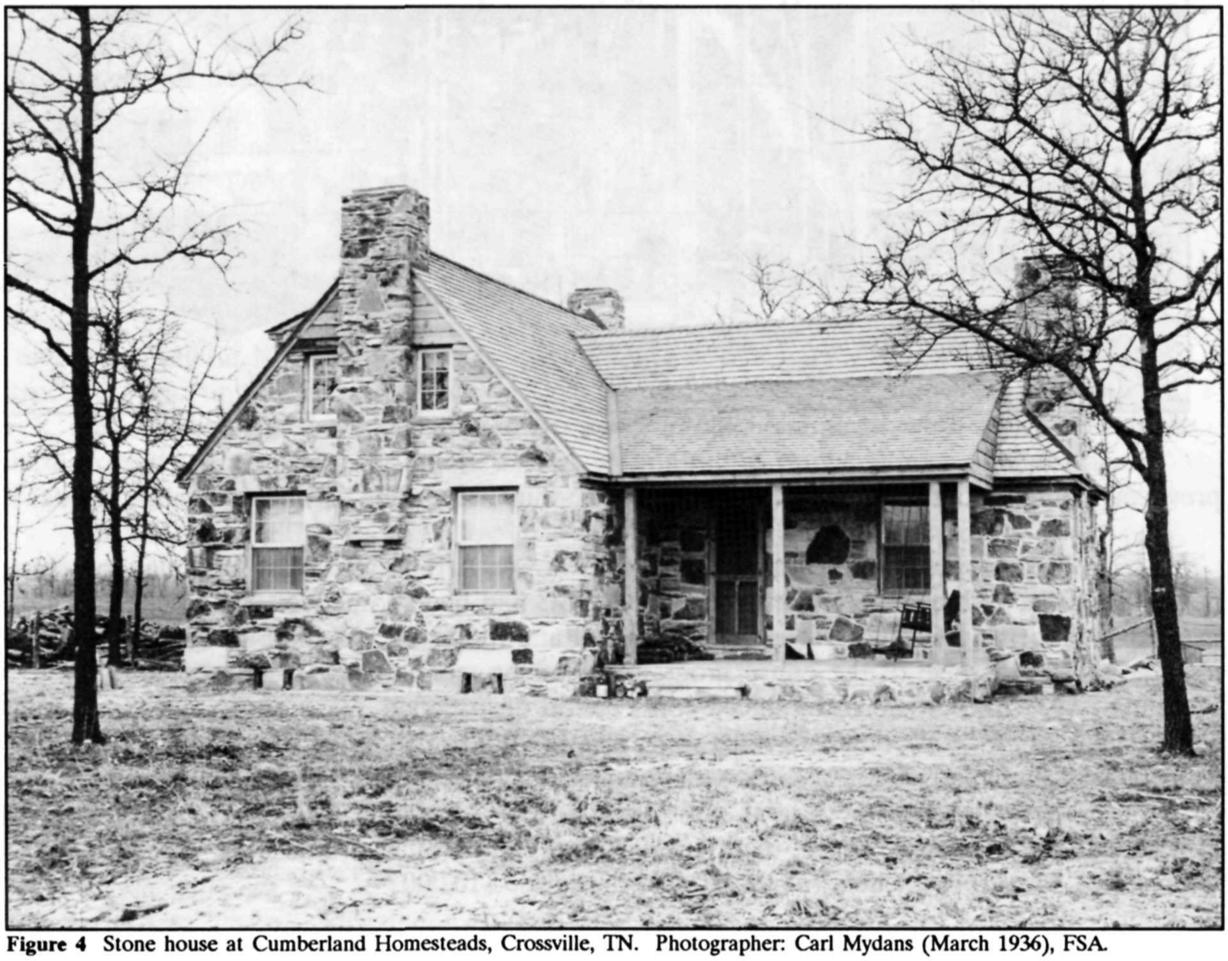

Figure 4 Stone house at Cumberland Homesteads, Crossville, TN. Photographer: Carl Mydans (March 1936), FSA.

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[24] Conkin, 337.

[25] Conkin, 117.

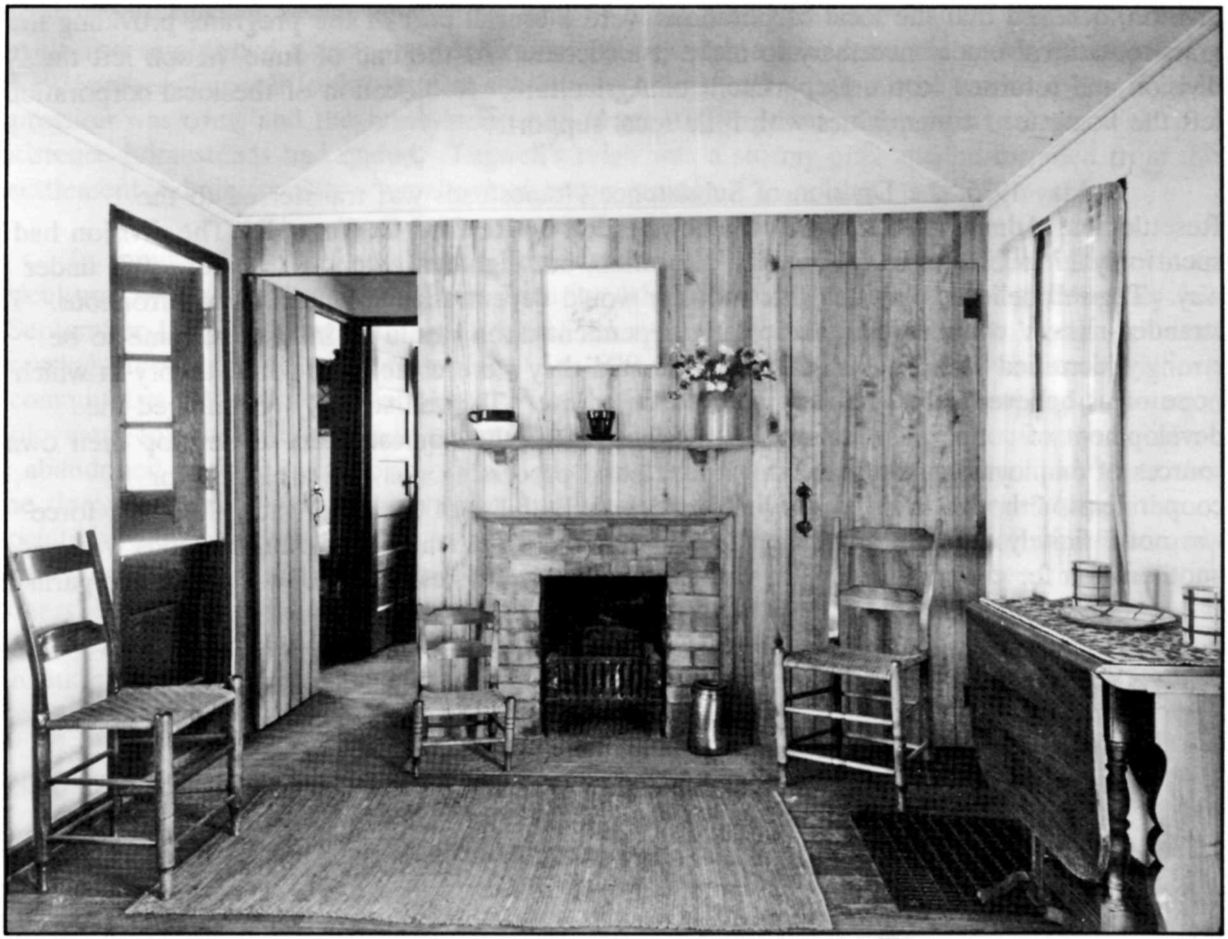

Figure 5 Interior of house at Arthurdale, WV. Photographer: Elmer Johnson (May 1934), FSA.

> We want the leaders of industry to establish branch factories near our homesteads projects. Instead of adding a wing to the old plant, let them consider the possibility of establishing a small branch plant where they can draw upon homestead labor, ready and anxious for employment. Let them remember that these homesteaders are picked workers, they they have been carefully selected for character, integrity, and native ability, from among the thousands of persons who have made application.[26]

The effort was only occasionally successful.

In another crucial move, the administration of the subsistence homesteads was left entirely to the federal government. The homesteads were originally administered by the Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation in conjunction with subsidiary local corporations, in order to free the program from government red tape and to assure local involvement. Adverse rulings by the Comptroller General, however, severely limited the freedom of these local corporations, and in May 1934 Secretary Ickes abolished them. Wilson, head of the division, believed that the local corporations were a crucial part of the program, providing the grass-roots involvement necessary to make it a success. At the end of June Wilson left the division and returned to the Department of Agriculture. Nullification of the local corporations left the homestead communities with little local support.[27]

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[26] "Subsistence Homesteads, 1934," 32.

In May 1935, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads was transferred to the Resettlement Administration, a new agency headed by Rexford G. Tugwell. The division had spent only $7 million of its $25 million allocation, but eighteen communities were well under way. Tugwell believed the idea that industry would decentralize voluntarily was erroneous. The stranded-miners' communities, particularly dependent upon would-be industries, came to be strongly identified with Tugwell, although he said they were established "on a theory in which none of us believed"--that industry would decentralize. Tugwell strongly encouraged the development of cooperative enterprises, for he wanted the homesteaders to develop their own sources of employment. Agricultural produce and processing was one area ripe for cooperatives, although there was a limit to the profitability of the land; thus, the labor force was not infinitely expandable. Community purchasing of machinery and other goods was another area for cooperatives. One community--Jersey Homesteads--had a cooperative garment

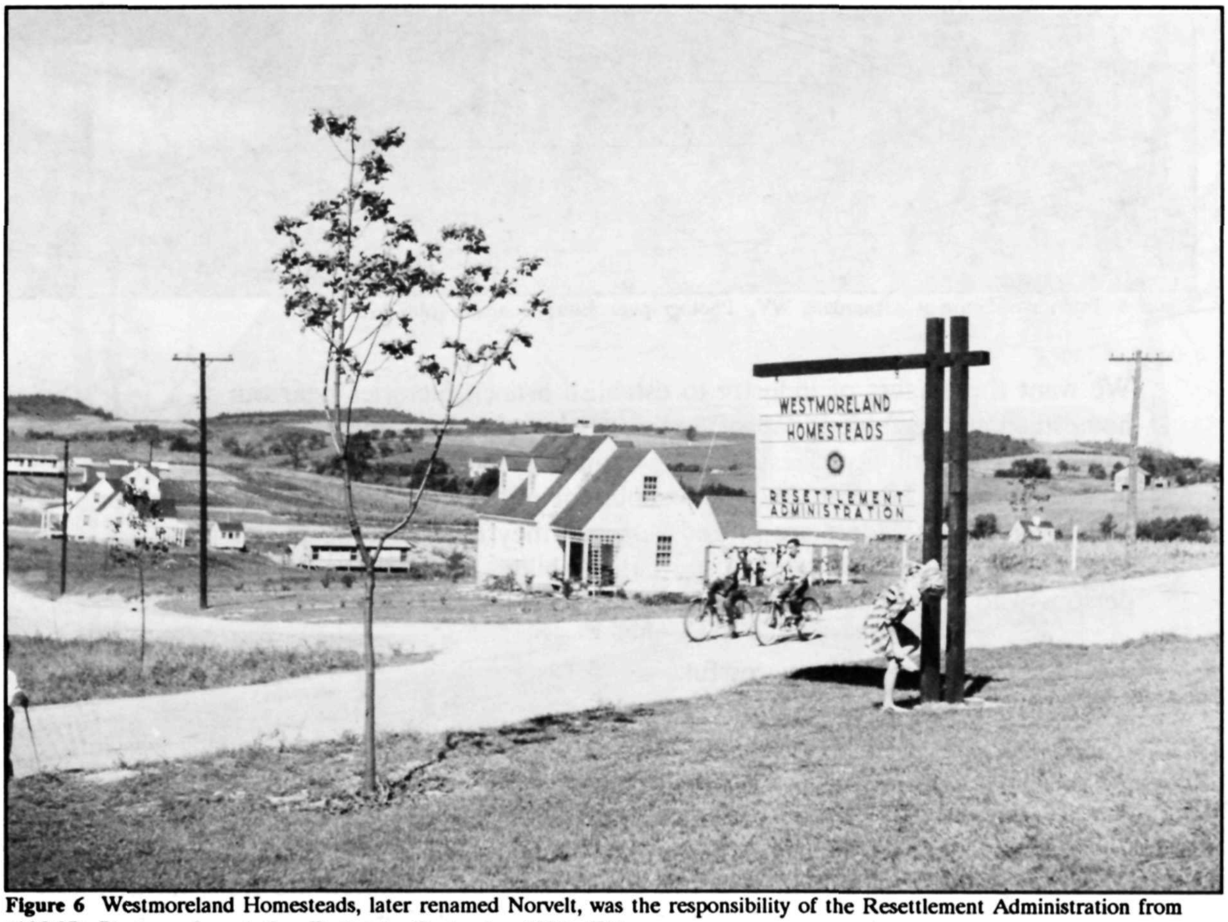

Figure 6 Westmoreland Homesteads, later renamed Norvelt, was the responsibility of the Resettlement Administration from 1935-37. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein (September 1936), FSA.

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[27] Lord and Johnstone, 45; Conkin, 122.

factory, which Tugwell, noting opposition, said "is considered to be the limit."[28] Soon after, Norvelt also established a cooperative garment factory with a loan from the government. By mid-1935, when Tugwell took over the subsistence-homestead program, the worst of the Depression was over, and the honeymoon period granted experimental programs such as subsistence homesteads had ended. Tugwell's reign was a stormy one, and he resigned from the Resettlement Administration after about eighteen months.

In January 1937, the subsistence homesteads were transferred to the Department of Agriculture, which established the Farm Security Administration, under whose umbrella they fell in September 1937. Having withstood several years of attacks, the program was under increasing pressure to sell off its property. In 1939 Congress cut off funds for the completion of communities. Mobilization for World War II caused some coal mines to re-open, providing employment for homesteaders and other jobless miners. In the Connellsville region, some of the abandoned beehive-oven coking plants re-opened, as the demand for coke soared.[29] At the same time, the homestead program came under increased fire in Congress, where cooperative associations and long leases struck members as antithetical to American ideals of capitalism and home-ownership. In 1946 the Farm Security Administration programs were moved to the Farmers' Home Corporation, which was given eighteen months to liquidate all property. By February 1948, all of the subsistence homestead units--more than 10,000--had been sold to individuals and homestead associations.

RESPONSE OF THE AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

When M. L. Wilson left the Division of Subsistence Homesteads in 1934, Clarence Pickett returned to the AFSC. He immediately proposed that the Friends sponsor their own subsistence-homestead community--Penn-Craft. The one element Pickett cited in his autobiography that would make this new homestead different from those of the government was self-help construction.[30] Unlike in the other stranded-miners' communities, construction labor would be traded among the homesteaders--a more cooperative approach than the credit-for-labor system in the federal communities. In fact, Pickett's oblique comments about "no government restrictions" probably referred to his desire to make this new community far more cooperative than congressional sentiment would permit the government projects. The new town supported a cooperative industry from the beginning, and an active local cooperative association.

Other differences included the size of the project and the role of the private sector. Pickett's first task was to raise $200,000 to finance the project. He met with immediate success, receiving $80,000 from the U.S. Steel Corporation, which owned most of the coal mines and coke plants in Fayette County. To make the project more manageable, the Friends' homestead would be considerably smaller (only fifty families compared to Westmoreland's 254), and the participants carefully screened. In addition, the homesteaders would participate in every aspect of the project, from construction to administration. Penn-Craft was constructed in due course, and was deemed a success by planners and homesteaders alike. By stressing self-help and cooperation, the AFSC succeeded in creating a model community to be replicated elsewhere in the United States and abroad, wherever social and economic relief was needed.

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[28] Resettlement Administration, 5; Rexford G. Tugwell, "Cooperation and Resettlement," Current History 45 (February 1937): 74-75.

[29] Enman, 332.

[30] Pickett, 64.

Proud to share their ideas, the Friends established a self-help counseling service in 1944. After the war, the AFSC's experience with Penn-Craft benefited industrial workers in Lorain, Ohio, a community center for blacks in Indianapolis, and the AFSC's own slum-clearance project in Philadelphia. Today there are an estimated 5,000 self-help housing organizations nationwide.[31] But if the self-help aspect of the project survived, the subsistence farming did not. The subsistence-homestead idea quietly faded, lost in post-war prosperity and increased urbanization.

ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

Today, the social reform aspects of these New Deal subsistence-homestead communities--the cooperative associations, self-help construction programs, and government and AFSC involvement--are gone. Built as visionary, experimental projects, the communities have outgrown their new-ness and innovation. What distinguishes them today from the coal-patch towns that surround them are the aspects of environmental reform that they embodied. Unlike the regular rows of two-story gable-roofed houses that the coal companies built for their workers, and unlike the occasional nineteenth-century farmhouse with an aggregation of ells and porches, these are small, tidy, free-standing houses, set on ample lots. The design intent of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, shared by the AFSC, is reflected in both the towns that are the subject of this study.

The design of the houses sparked a debate over whether to provide minimal housing, appropriate for a relief program, or model housing, appropriate to a demonstration program. Simplistically, the argument came down to the provision of indoor toilets. One camp, led by President Roosevelt and Secretary Ickes, favored the construction of minimal houses without plumbing or electricity, while another faction, led by Eleanor Roosevelt and M. L. Wilson, supported four- or five-room houses with modern conveniences. Since in 1933 most of rural America still lacked indoor plumbing and electricity, whether to include such amenities in a federal housing project was a potentially explosive issue. Senators such as Harry F. Byrd of Virginia and K. D. McKellar of Tennessee especially condemned the "extravagance" of electricity, refrigerators, and indoor toilets for "simple mountain folk." Indoor facilities were a burdensome amenity to homesteaders who were struggling to purchase the homes they had built, as the modern conveniences increased the cost of the houses. Bruce Melvin, a sociologist with the division, stated his desire "to build houses that provide a better standard of living than that to which the families are accustomed." By his reasoning, if family members were used to sharing a toilet, whether outside or inside, with four or five other families, then providing them

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[31] AFSC, Annual Report 1944: 22; Pickett, 81; Richard J. Margolis, Something to Build On: The Future of Self-Help Housing in the Struggle Against Poverty (International Self-Help Housing Associates and the AFSC, 1967), 21; Wright, 278.

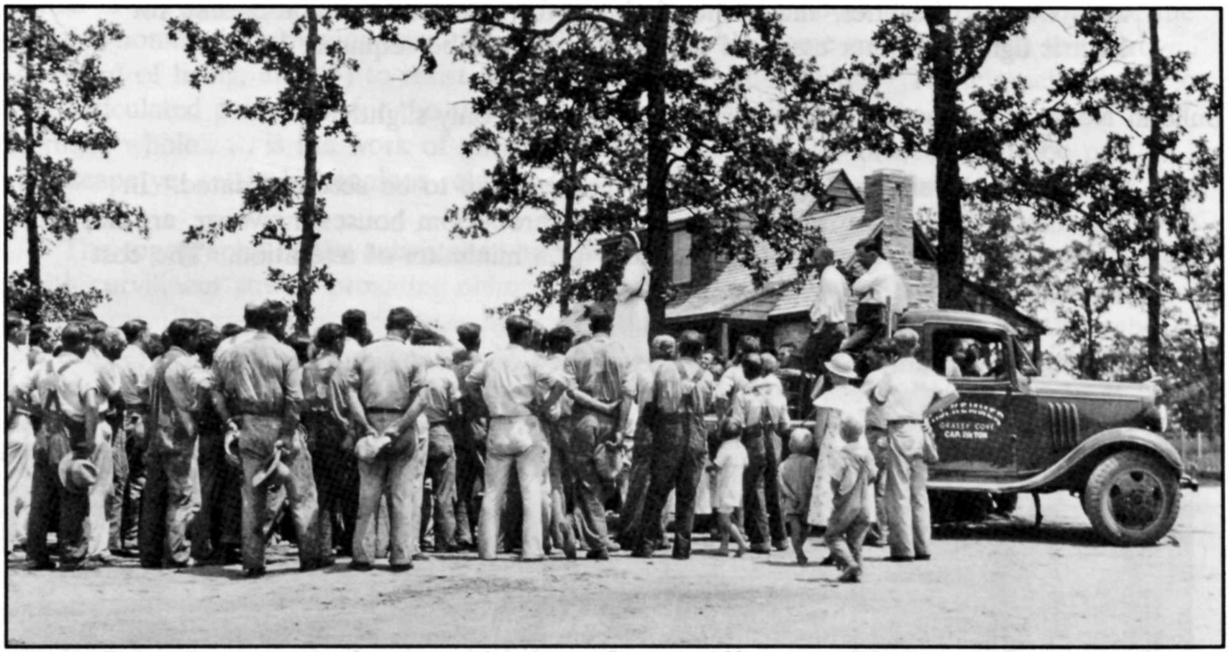

Figure 7 Eleanor Roosevelt addressing a group of workers at Cumberland Homesteads, TN. Photographer and date unknown, FSA.

with their own toilet, even if outside, was an improvement that they could afford.[32]

Eleanor Roosevelt is usually credited with changing the President's mind on this issue. After her August 1933 visit to coal camps and AFSC relief efforts in West Virginia, she became a vocal advocate of modern conveniences for miners' families. She was aided by Clarence Pickett, who found an acceptable political reason to provide bathrooms--to revive the plumbing-fixtures industry. He was told that "if every family in the United States were to have one bathtub, all the bathtub factories in the United States would have to work eight hours a day for ten years to supply the demand."[33] The provision of indoor toilets was initially the policy of the subsistence-homesteads program, but the bathroom debate continued through the life of the program.

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads' Circular No. 1 set general policies for the program and issued the following instructions:

> The homestead developments will be laid out and constructed in accordance with approved planning, architectural, and engineering practice. While the structures and other facilities must necessarily be moderate in cost, they will conform to standards of convenience, durability, sanitation, and attractiveness with sufficient variation in design to avoid monotony. Availability of highway or other

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[32] Elizabeth Straw, "National Register of Historic Places: Cumberland Homesteads Historic District," National Park Service, 1988; George S. Wehrwein, "An Appraisal of Resettlement," Journal of Farm Economics 19 (1937): 198; Bruce L. Melvin, "Housing Standards for Subsistence Homes," Architectural Record 77 (January 1935): 9.

[33] Clarence E. Pickett, "The Social Significance of the Subsistence Homestead Movement," Journal of Home Economics 26 (October 1934): 479.

> transportation facilities, and proper facilities for health and sanitation and for electric light and other essential utility services, will be required.[34]

Bulletin No. 1, issued a year later, clarified the situation only slightly:

> Houses vary in size and cost according to the group to be accommodated. In size, the houses range from 3 to 6 rooms. Three-room houses, however, are not constructed if they cannot be expanded with a minimum of alteration. The cost of houses will be from $2,000 to $3,000.[35]

Bruce Melvin, an assistant to M. L. Wilson, expanded on the design issues in an article

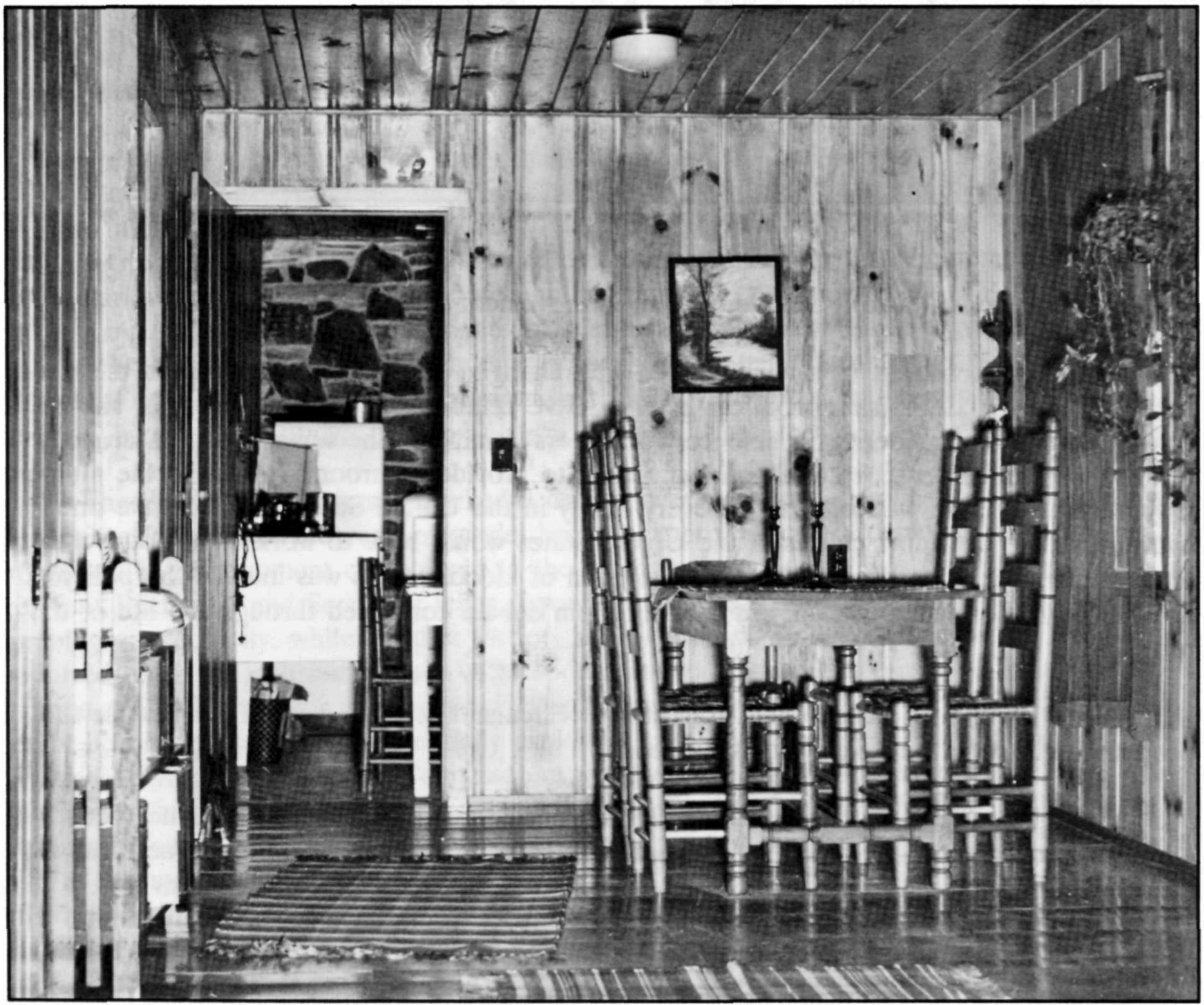

Figure 8 Interior of a house at Cumberland Homesteads, TN. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein (May 1937), FSA.

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[34] Circular No. 1, 11.

[35] U.S. Department of the Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, "Information Concerning the Purposes and Policies of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads" (Bulletin No. 1, 1934), 5.

published in the Architectural Record in January 1935. Melvin noted that the purposes of the subsistence-homestead program were threefold: (1) to enable home ownership; (2) to improve the standard of living; and (3) to assist the occupants "to better living." To help achieve the last, he articulated guidelines for the site and the house. Noting that "the making of an harmonious whole . . . is the work of an artist," he advised that the houses should be part of the landscape yet set in harmonious relation to each other and to the community center.[36]

The topography of the subsistence-homestead communities determined the layout of the site, with curvilinear streets providing oblique views, designed to lessen the impact of repetitive housing forms. There was some hierarchy among the streets, with heavily traveled through-streets complemented by circles and cul-de-sacs. These features, reflecting contemporary planning thought, had appeared in the government-built, shipyard-workers' communities.[37] The concept of the subsistence-homestead program was more rural than suburban, with generous acreage surrounding small single-family houses. Yet the preservation of a greenbelt surrounding the subsistence-homestead communities and the determination to attract industry were also goals of garden-city planning.[38]

New Deal historian Paul Conkin has identified the development of a functional rural architecture as one of the innovations of the subsistence-homestead program. Wilson had issued a challenge early in 1934:

> There is a need for new types of low cost comfortable and attractive houses which are architecturally beautiful and acceptable and adapted to the subsistence homestead communities. Will it not be possible to work out types of houses which will be cheap but beautiful, durable and convenient, and adapted to mass production and still utilize unskilled labor in their construction?[39]

Based neither on urban homes nor impractical rural designs, the proposed buildings were closest to single-family suburban prototypes. Melvin noted: "they are neither city nor farm homes; they lie midway between the two." His instructions were:

> The architecture, plan, elevation and general appearance should be part of a planned scheme and be based upon the indigenous architecture of the region, unless it is definitely desirable to introduce a completely new plan of

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[36] Melvin, 9.

[37] Other aspects of the shipyard communities, such as multiple-family dwellings and different types of dwellings aimed at different classes of workers, did not appear in the subsistence-homestead communities. John Nolen, New Towns for Old: Achievements in Civic Improvement in Some American Small Towns and Neighborhoods, 2nd ed. (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1937). Nolen was an interesting connection between the two; a specialist in industrial housing, Nolen had worked on the shipyard communities, and twenty-five years later served as an adviser to the subsistence-homestead program.

[38] Other 1920s innovations in planning had little applicability to the subsistence-homestead program. Clarence Stein and Henry Wright's Radburn, New Jersey, hailed as the American embodiment of the garden-city movement, featured interior parks, multiple-family dwellings, and strict separation of automobile and pedestrian--items not relevant to the farm-oriented subsistence-homestead communities. Clarence S. Stein, Toward New Towns for America (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corp., 1957), 41.

[39] Conkin, 172; Wilson, 81.

> construction involving the most modern designs and materials.[40]

In Homestead Houses, a collection of thirty-two perspectives and plans, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads carefully noted the geographic location or proposed location of the houses, distinguishing between northern and southern types. The authors apologized for cost-cutting measures, and noted, "they are to be so interpreted as not to discourage local and regional needs and traditions."[41] Regionalism was further addressed in a 1935 article: "In the southern regions the house plans generally follow the local traditions and styles of building, in California and Florida houses of Spanish or Mediterranean type are used, and in the northern sections designs are generally colonial."[42] Local building materials were also used, such as the crab orchard sandstone used on the Cumberland Homesteads in Tennessee, and the adobe used for construction of Phoenix Homesteads in Arizona.

The architectural styles, where apparent, were conservative, with terms such as "Cape Cod" or "New England Colonial" being freely used. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads' architectural adviser was Andrew H. Hepburn, of the Boston architectural firm of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, noted for the restoration and reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg. Hepburn may have been responsible for the stylistically conservative bent of the subsistence homesteads.

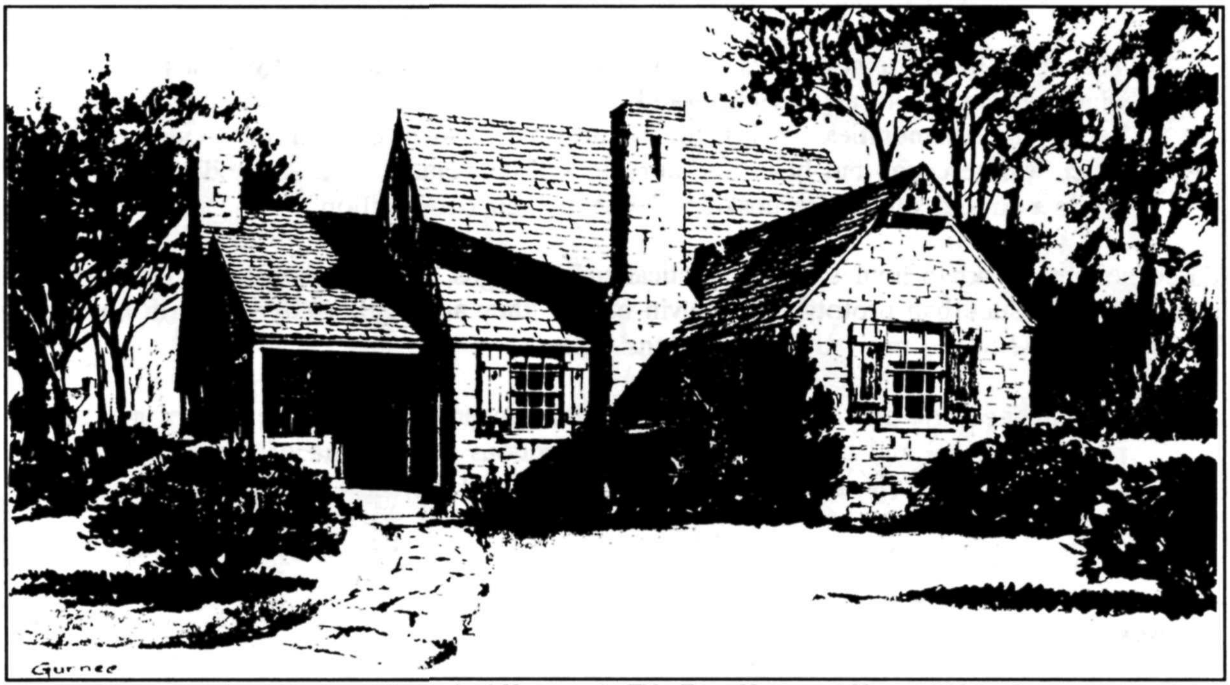

Figure 9 Perspective view of house at Cumberland Homesteads, TN. From Homestead Houses (1934), 19.

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[40] Melvin, 9.

[41] U.S. Department of the Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, Homestead Houses (1934), 2. The houses were designed by the Architectural Unit (Brown Rolston, chief) of the Construction Section (J. H. Jenkins, chief) of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, and by private architects associated with the Division. The title page also listed as consultants: Blanche Halbert, House Planning; A. H. Hepburn, Architecture; and John Nolen, Land Planning.

[42] "Subsistence Homesteads, 1934," 24.

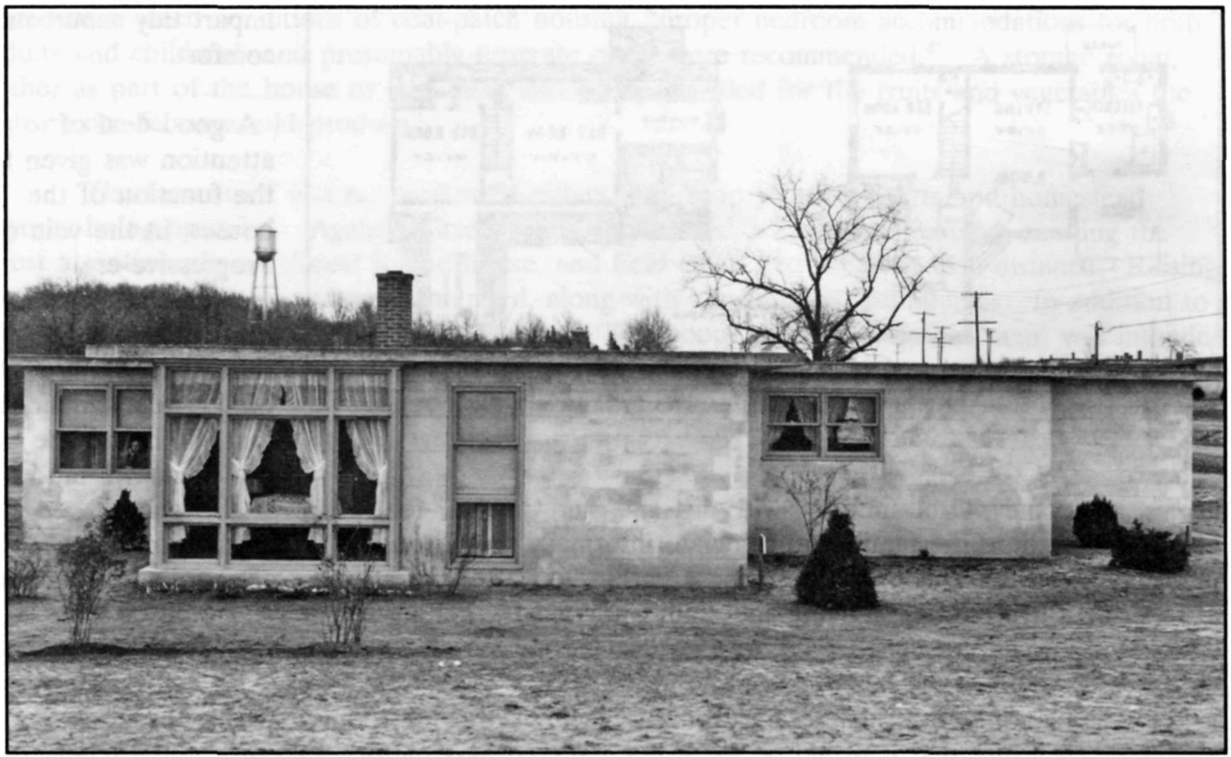

Figure 10 House at Jersey Homesteads, NJ. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein (February 1937), FSA.

The promotion of indigenous styles may have also been an attempt to eliminate any connotations of foreignness from the project. Sensitive to criticisms that the subsistence-homestead projects benefitted non-citizens, the designers may have wished to avoid "foreign" revival styles. In addition, modern architecture was associated with European socialist movements, and the cooperative nature of the program was enough to alarm those opposed to socialism.[43] One homestead project, Jersey Homesteads (now the town of Roosevelt, New Jersey), was built in the modern style; the flat roofs and sharp corners of those houses are a vivid contrast to the more staid architecture employed elsewhere.

But the hallmark of the collection was form, rather than style. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads publication advised:

> The architectural merit of the design depends not upon superficial ornamentation and decoration but upon the proportion of one mass to another, the relation of roof to walls, the placing of doors and window openings, the slope of the roof, etc.[44]

This collection of plans and perspectives shows a number of small, one- or one-and-a-half-story buildings, often in an L-plan, with porches and other variations. Although not large, the houses

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[43] Wright, 273.

[44] Homestead Houses, 2.

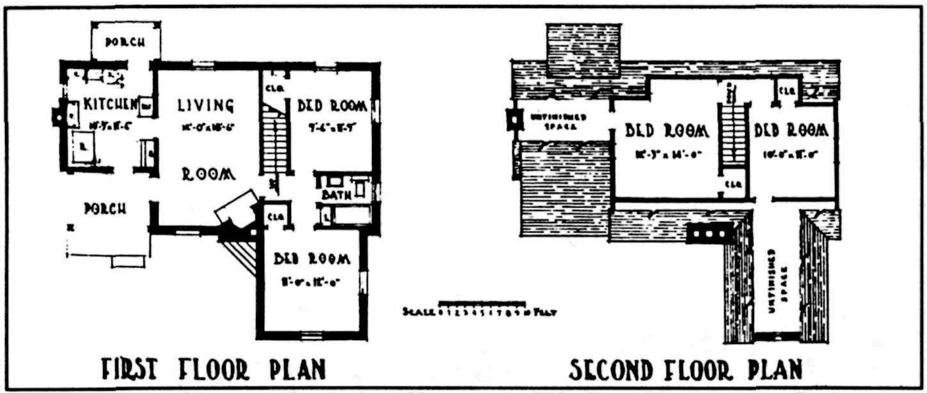
PORCH
KITCHEN
LIVING ROOM
BED ROOM
CLO.
BATH
PORCH
CLO.
BED ROOM
SCALE 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 FEET
UNFINISHED SPACE
BED ROOM
BED ROOM
CLO.
CLO.
UNFINISHED SPACE
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Figure 11 Plans of house at Cumberland Homesteads, TN. From Monthly Labor Review (January 1935), 25.

impart tidy suburban comfort.

A good deal of attention was given to the function of the houses, in the vein of Progressive-era architectural reform. Particular to a subsistence homstead, Melvin recommended that the houses be provided with mud rooms, as people will be entering with dirt and mud on their feet. Melvin also encouraged a living room "where the family can associate informally and joyously."[45] The division's publication clarified this by discouraging a parlor "too often reserved for extraordinary functions" in favor of a living room "suitably and abundantly used." Dining rooms were omitted and double-purpose spaces encouraged, as a cost-saving measure.[46]

Circulation was a related concern. By placing the living room centrally, the designers attempted to insure that it would be used, not reserved as a parlor. Likewise, the kitchen should be central. Melvin was particularly concerned for the housewives' happiness:

> It is most important to consider the place and work of the woman in this home, because much of the success of the family in the homestead will depend on the contentment of the wife. Though this is a way of life, it is one that may be exceedingly hard for the wife, part of whose duty will be to oversee the production and preserving of food.[47]

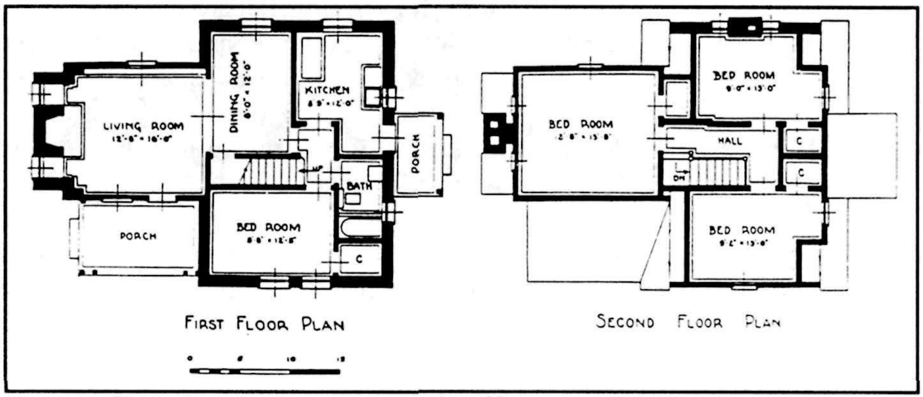
LIVING ROOM
12'-0" × 10'-0"
DINING ROOM
8'-0" × 12'-0"
KITCHEN
8'-9" × 12'-0"
PORCH
UP
BATH
PORCH
BED ROOM
C
BED ROOM
BED ROOM
HALL
C
C
DN
BED ROOM
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
0
5
10
15

Figure 12 Plans of another house at Cumberland Homesteads, TN. From Small Houses (1939).

The government also advised that the bedrooms should be arranged so that no one would have to pass through another bedroom to get to the bathroom. In attempting to alleviate the overcrowded conditions of coal-patch housing, "proper bedroom accommodations for both adults and children"--and presumably separate ones--were recommended.[48] A storage room, either as part of the house or detached, should be provided for the fruits and vegetables the subsistence farms would produce.

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[45] Melvin, 9.

[46] Homestead Houses, 2.

[47] Melvin, 10.

The farm itself was not neglected either, with crop rotation charts and homestead layouts being provided. Again, efficiency was emphasized, with those elements needing the most attention placed closest to the house, and field crops and orchards at a distance. Raising poultry, cows, and pigs was recommended, along with appropriate outbuildings. In addition to a vegetable garden, an orchard was encouraged. The cooperative use of equipment was intended to reduce the cost of farming; the Division of Subsistence Homesteads even provided a plan for a three-family cooperative farm, complete with three-year crop-rotation plan.[49]

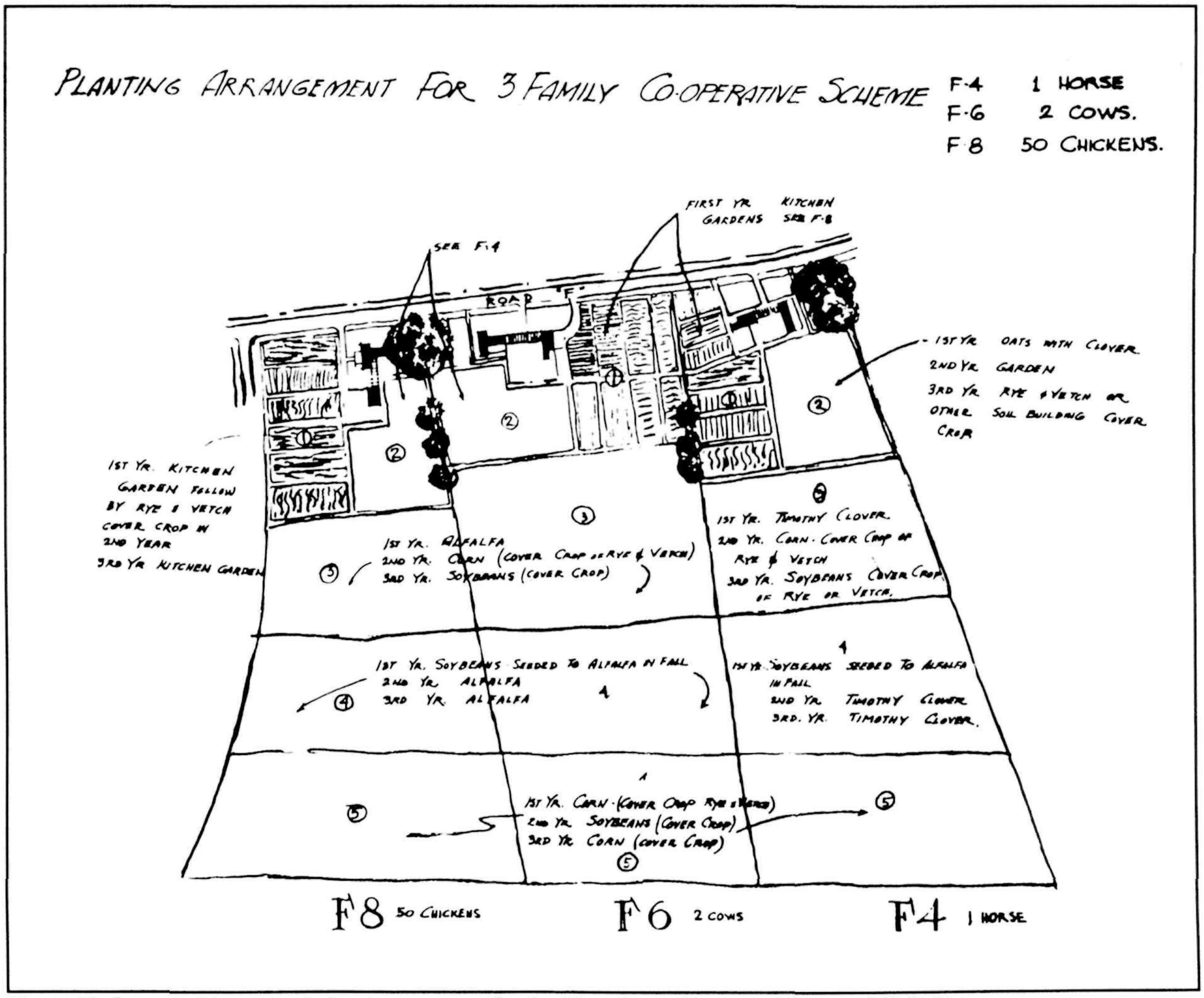
PLANTING ARRANGEMENT FOR 3 FAMILY CO-OPERATIVE SCHEME
F-4 1 HORSE
F-6 2 COWS.
F 8 50 CHICKENS.
FIRST YR KITCHEN GARDENS SEE F-8
SEE F-4
ROAD "F"
1ST YR OATS WITH CLOVER
2ND YR GARDEN
3RD YR RYE & VETCH OR OTHER SOIL BUILDING COVER CROP
1ST YR. KITCHEN GARDEN FOLLOW BY RYE & VETCH COVER CROP IN 2ND YEAR
3RD YR KITCHEN GARDEN
①
②
③
1ST YR. ALFALFA
2ND YR. CORN (COVER CROP OF RYE & VETCH)
3RD YR. SOYBEANS (COVER CROP)
1ST YR. TIMOTHY CLOVER
2ND YR. CORN. COVER CROP OF RYE & VETCH
3RD YR. SOYBEANS COVER CROP OF RYE OR VETCH.
④
1ST YR. SOYBEANS SEEDED TO ALFALFA IN FALL
2ND YR ALFALFA
3RD YR. ALFALFA
1ST YR. SOYBEANS SEEDED TO ALFALFA IN FALL
2ND YR. TIMOTHY CLOVER
3RD. YR. TIMOTHY CLOVER.
⑤
1ST YR. CORN (COVER CROP RYE & VETCH)
2ND YR. SOYBEANS (COVER CROP)
3RD YR CORN (COVER CROP)
F8 50 CHICKENS
F6 2 COWS
F4 1 HORSE

Figure 13 Layout of homesteads for three cooperating families. From Homestead Houses (1934), 71.

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[48] Homestead Houses, 2.

[49] Homestead Houses, 68, 71.

In 1939, after five years' experience with subsistence homesteads, the government issued another pamphlet on house design, Small Houses. The government's experience with subsistence-homestead communities was apparent; some of the subsistence-homestead houses were used to illustrate the new pamphlet. The plans were compact, convenient, and functional: "every unnecessary gable, beam, and purely decorative feature was eliminated." The quality of the older houses was maintained: "first-grade materials were used throughout, so that maintenance and repair costs would be as low as possible." But the newer publication stressed economy, claiming that its houses could be built for $1,000 to $1,500--half the cost predicted five years before. Precutting, prefabrication, and mass production had proven effective in reducing costs. In addition, the new plans did not insist on bathrooms in every house.[50]

Although the subsistence homesteads were intended as low-cost housing projects, their experimental and demonstrative aspects caused the costs to rise prohibitively. Architecturally, the demonstration-program aspect was reflected in the attempt to provide indoor bathrooms for all, while the experimental nature is seen in the indigenous styles and materials. Today, several decades later, low-cost housing depends on high volume and leaves no room for indigenous building traditions. In the resulting uniformity across the American landscape, the sensitivity to design and the visionary quality of the subsistence homesteads are sadly lacking.

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[50] U. S. Department of Agriculture, Farm Security Administration, Small Houses (1939), unpaginated. By 1939, the Farm Security Administration administered the subsistence-homestead program.

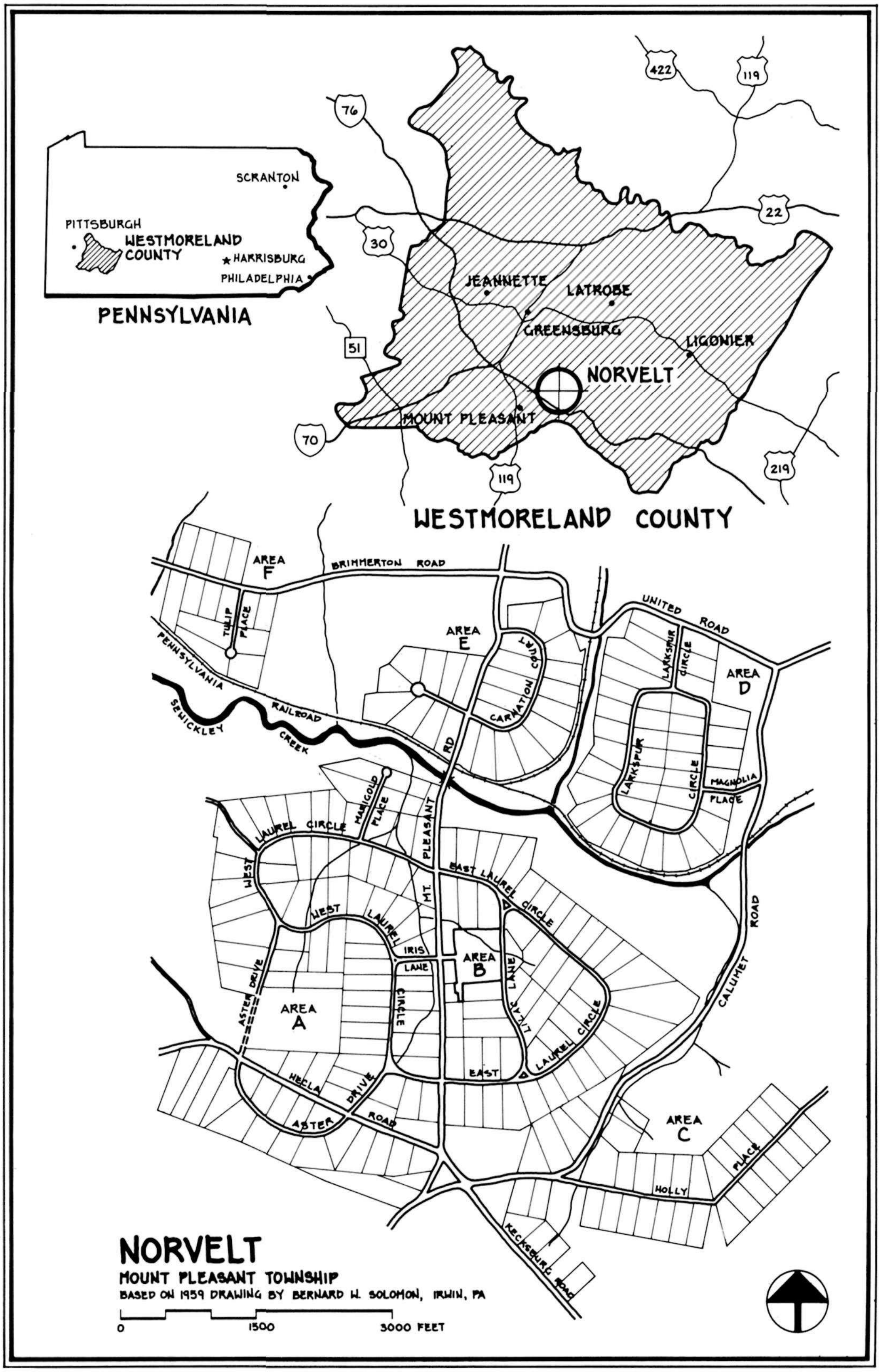
PENNSYLVANIA
SCRANTON
PITTSBURGH
WESTMORELAND COUNTY
HARRISBURG
PHILADELPHIA
422
119
76
22
30
JEANNETTE
LATROBE
GREENSBURG
LIGONIER
51
NORVELT
MOUNT PLEASANT
70
119
219
WESTMORELAND COUNTY
AREA F
BRIMMERTON ROAD
TULIP PLACE
PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD
SEWICKLEY CREEK
AREA E
CARNATION COURT
UNITED ROAD
LARKSPUR CIRCLE
AREA D
MAGNOLIA PLACE
MARIGOLD PLACE
MT. PLEASANT RD
WEST LAUREL CIRCLE
EAST LAUREL CIRCLE
IRIS LANE
AREA B
LILAC LANE
ASTER DRIVE
AREA A
CIRCLE
EAST LAUREL CIRCLE
CALUMET ROAD
HECLA ROAD
ASTER DRIVE
AREA C
HOLLY PLACE
KECKSBURG ROAD
NORVELT
MOUNT PLEASANT TOWNSHIP
BASED ON 1959 DRAWING BY BERNARD W. SOLOMON, IRWIN, PA
0
1500
3000 FEET

Figure 1 Site plan of Norvelt. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

CHAPTER 3

NORVELT

Mary Wolk has lived in Norvelt for more than fifty years and is one of the community's original homesteaders. Like most of the initial residents, Wolk and her husband, Anthony, applied for a government house hoping to improve their situation. The Wolks and their three children had previously lived in Whitney, a small coal community near Mount Pleasant. A miner, Anthony Wolk had been only partially employed through the 1920s, and completely unemployed for four years prior to 1934. The family had no money, having lost their small savings in 1929, and could not qualify for state or federal relief unless they sold their insurance policy first. The situation looked grim but "then Roosevelt was elected and God bless him and his family."[1]

The federal homestead projects gave families such as the Wolks an opportunity to start over again, to develop new skills, to learn self-reliance, and to regain self-confidence. But the government made no promises; the homesteads were experimental, and families were expected to work hard and do their share to make the communities a success. In his "Message to Friends and Neighbors in Mount Pleasant Township," David W. Day, community manager at Westmoreland Homesteads, explained:

> The families privileged to live here are here, not by special favor, but for the purpose of demonstrating in the highest measure possible, the advantages and possibilities of Cooperative Community life as a means of making all life richer and more abundant . . . Westmoreland Homesteads is not considered to be the complete answer to the problem of insecurity for even a small group of families, but it does represent a genuine effort and a start in the proper direction, i.e., to lay the foundations of opportunity whereby people with no previous hope for the future may help themselves.[2]

Only 29 years old, Day was a Quaker social worker from Indiana whose considerable enthusiasm and talent led to his selection over other qualified candidates for the position as community manager. In that capacity, he oversaw the construction of 250 houses by their future occupants; he helped select the homesteaders from hundreds of unemployed miners; and he encouraged subsistence gardening, industrial development, and formation of cooperative associations as means of giving the unemployed the wherewithal to become self-sufficient.

The federal government selected Mount Pleasant Township, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, as the site of its new homestead project, and on April 13, 1934, officially acquired the first tracts of land from the heirs of James P. Hurst.[3] Located eight miles southeast of

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[1] Mary Wolk, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, June 1989, Norvelt.

[2] A Tribute to Norvelt and Her First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt: Fifty Years of Progress. (Norvelt: privately printed, 1987).

[3] Fifty Years of Progress.

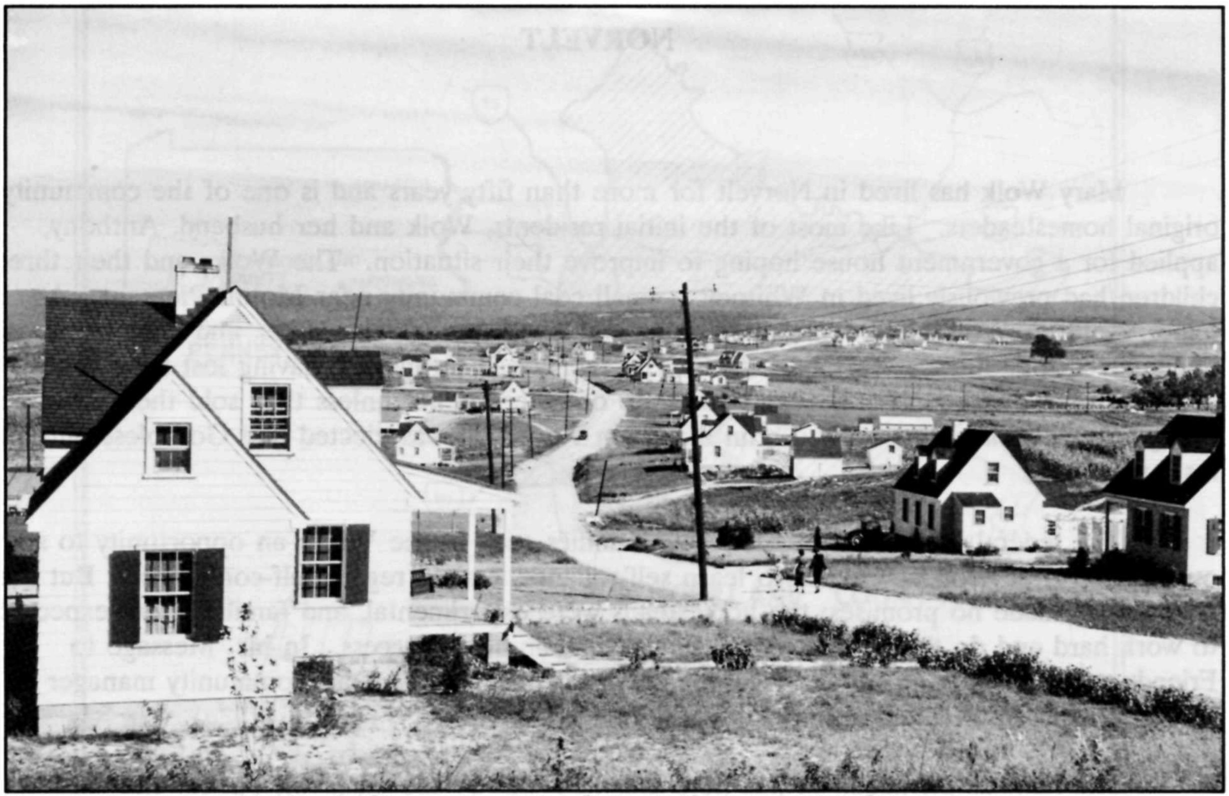

Figure 2 A curving road in Norvelt. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein (September 1936), FSA.

Greensburg, Pennsylvania, and thirty-eight miles southeast of Pittsburgh, the Hurst farm was surrounded by idle mines. Owned and operated primarily by the H. C. Frick Coal and Coke Company, a subsidiary of the U.S. Steel Corporation, each mine had an associated cluster of company-owned houses called a "patch." With its mines closed or operating on a reduced scale, and with hundreds of miners stranded in its patches, Mount Pleasant Township provided the perfect laboratory for a rehabilitation project to be called Westmoreland Homesteads, renamed Norvelt in 1937.

THE HOMESTEADERS

Many local miners wanted to live in the new project. Applications poured in from Mammoth, Hecla, United, Whitney, Weltytown, Calumet, Standard and other Pennsylvania patches. In accordance with the government's standards, preference was given to families on relief, with children, with garden or farming experience, or with some other combination of factors. In all, 1,850 families applied; only 254 were chosen.

These families were intended to represent a cross section of the mining population of Westmoreland County. A 1940 survey of the accepted families revealed that 85 percent were American born, and more than 75 percent of those were born in Pennsylvania. The average family was composed of 5.5 persons including 3.3 children, and the average age of the father was 39. About two-thirds of the families earned less than $1,000 annually and were on some form of economic relief before applying, and about 40 percent of heads of households had been employed as miners.[4] But there were exceptions.

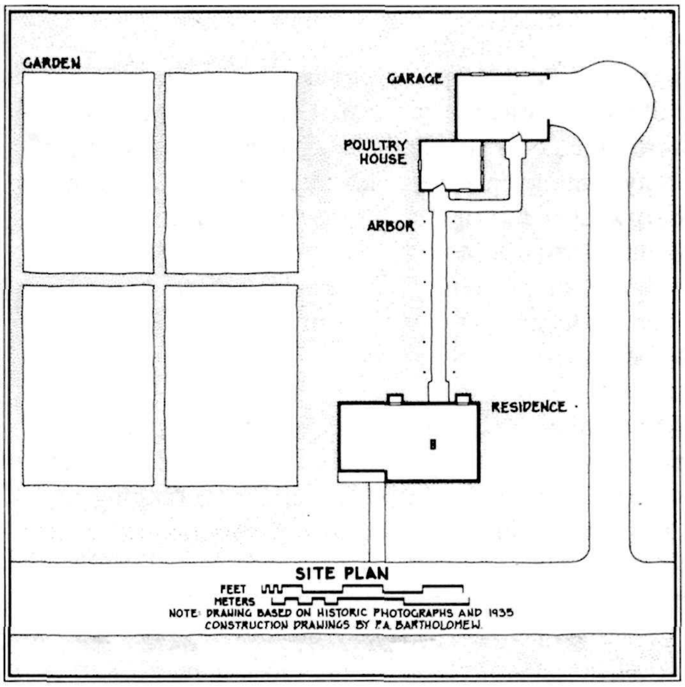
GARDEN
GARAGE
POULTRY HOUSE
ARBOR
RESIDENCE
SITE PLAN
FEET
METERS
NOTE: DRAWING BASED ON HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS AND 1935 CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS BY F.A. BARTHOLOMEW.

Figure 3 One of several site plans designed by architect Bartholomew for Norvelt. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

Chauncey and Helen White were renting a small house near Mount Pleasant when they read an advertisement for Westmoreland Homesteads in the newspaper which "told all about how people could buy a home, and we liked that very much. We had children and wanted a nice home where they could get a good education." Like hundreds of other families, the Whites submitted an application. When no response came, they submitted another--and another, and another. They went to meetings all over the township, but because the Whites were black, they were continually rebuffed. "We wanted a home. That's what we were fighting and pushing for," said Helen. Finally, the Whites appealed their case to a higher authority; they wrote a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt. Despite "obstacles and the disapproval of many," the Whites and their six children moved into Westmoreland Homesteads in 1936. According to their daughter, Norma Williams, "It was alright after everyone got to know us. We led a pretty quiet and happy life here."[5]

Looking back, Helen White remarked, "We were all poor, working-class people. Most families had children and wanted to be near schools." In that respect, she said, "everyone was just like us." Black or white, employed or unemployed, Westmoreland homesteaders shared a strong sense of identity and comraderie during the early years. The community manager believed that "a certain community cohesiveness was imperative to the successful establishment and permanent operation of a new community of this type."[6] Much of the initial "community cohesiveness" derived from the construction of the houses, but the visual cohesion is due to their designs.

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[4] Ward Beckwith, "Westmoreland Homesteads after Five Years of Growth" (Norvelt, 1940), 7.

[5] Helen White, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 30 June 1989, Norvelt; Norma White Williams quoted in Greensburg Tribune Review, 15 November 1988.

[6] Beckwith, 7.

DESIGN

The community and houses were designed by Paul A. Bartholomew. Born in Greensburg, Bartholomew established his architectural practice there in 1912, and evidently prospered. Before the Depression, his major commissions included the Classical Revival-style YMCA in Greensburg and a sprawling Tudor-style mansion for stockbroker Charles McKenna Lynch (now University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg's Lynch Hall).[7] The government contracted with Bartholomew on January 9, 1934, to lay out Westmoreland Homesteads (cost: $600), provide preliminary studies and working drawings of eight to ten houses ($85 per unit), and design the layout of each plot ($15 each).[8] Later, Bartholomew was contracted to design the school, store, tea room, gas station, and repair shop at Norvelt.

The 1,492-acre plot of land that would become Westmoreland Homesteads was already somewhat developed; it had five farmhouses, a network of roads, and several railroad lines cutting through it. Bartholomew subdivided 772 acres into 254 housing lots, ranging in size from 1.6 to seven acres, arranging them in four curvilinear sections and two smaller, linear

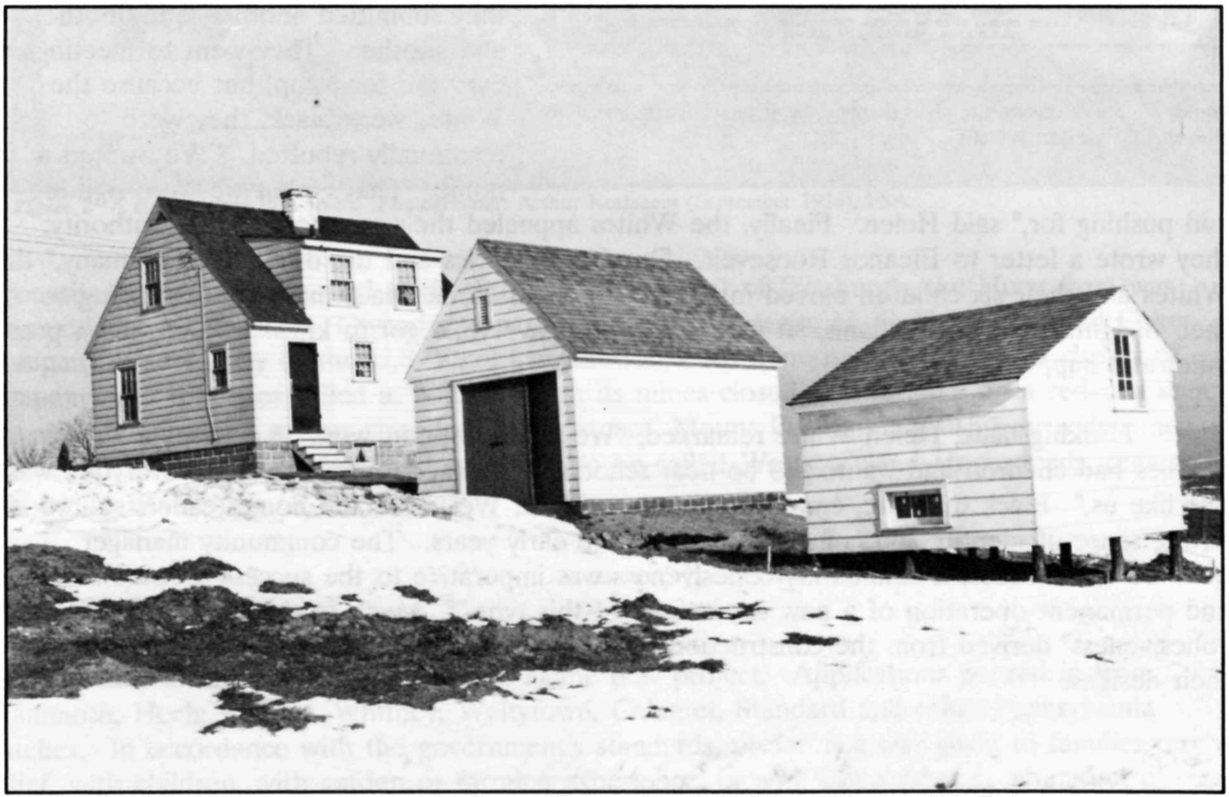

Figure 4 Newly built house, garage, and poultry house. Photographer: Carl Mydans (February 1936), FSA.

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[7] John A. Sakal, et al., "A Photographic Survey of Westmoreland County Architecture," Westmoreland County Museum of Art, Greensburg, 1979; James D. VanTrump, "Mansion's Charm, Integrity Preserved," Greensburg Tribune-Review: Focus, September 22, 1985. The small Tudor-style house that Bartholomew designed for himself still stands at 208 Kenneth St., Greensburg. Bartholomew's successor firm, Roach Walfish Lettrich, is still a prominent architectural firm in Greensburg.

[8] Contract between P.A. Bartholomew, architect, and Westmoreland Homesteads, Inc., Box 28, Farm Security Administration files, Record Group 207, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

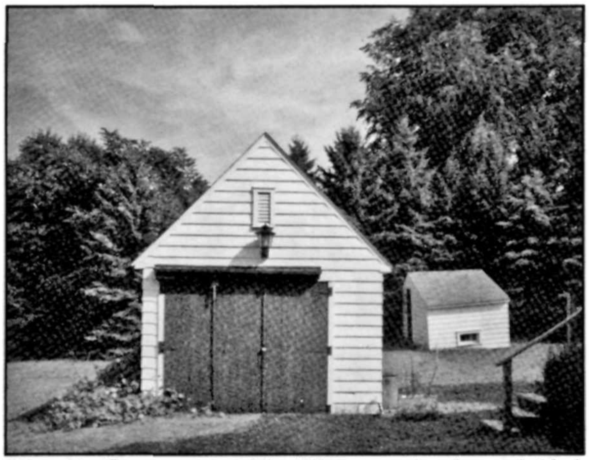

Figure 5 Garage with original doors, poultry house behind, Section B. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

ones. The remaining 720 acres were set aside as a cooperative farm surrounding the residential area. In the center of the community, thirteen acres were reserved for common facilities such as a twenty-room schoolhouse, athletic fields, playground, post office, and community buildings. The site was hilly and varied, but changed less than 100' in elevation, and the roads respected this topography. With house lots radiating from the curving roads, the houses were seen obliquely. Each house had outbuildings: garage, poultry house, and a grape arbor linking them. Because of the variety of buildings and their picturesque arrangement, the repetitive designs of the houses never became monotonous.

Working closely with government architects, Bartholomew designed simple, one-and-a-half-story, frame houses. With dormer windows, gable roofs, shutters, and front porches, the houses exhibit qualities of colonial-era, Pennsylvania farmhouses, heeding the Division of Subsistence Homesteads' guidelines that the designs reflect indigenous architecture. The newspaper described them as "the Pennsylvania farm house type," while the homesteaders called them "Cape Cod cottage in design." There were five plans: a four-room house, a six-room house, and three five-room houses. Bartholomew's contract called for the plans to have "provisions for future extensions"; although these are not evident in the drawings, numerous additions to Norvelt houses over the last fifty years exhibit the flexibility of the basic design. All the houses had cyprus siding, red-cedar shingles, plumbing, and central hot-air heat.[9]

Bartholomew's response to the guidelines issued by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, as discussed in the previous chapter, was effective. The buildings are part of the landscape, set in harmonious relation to each other, due to the curvilinear plans. The division called for variation in design, and with five basic plans, all of which could be reversed, Bartholomew essentially provided ten different designs.

One of the first was for a four-room house labeled Type 401. Featuring a front porch inset under the gable roof, Type 401 soon lost favor--probably because of the square footage lost to the porch--and was built only in Sections A and B. Type 401 was replaced by Type 402,

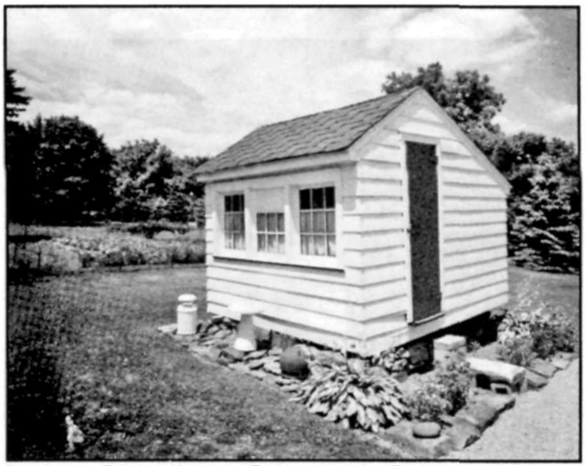

Figure 6 Poultry house. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

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[9] Greensburg Morning Review, 2 August 1934; "Our Community Booster Day," 14; U.S. Department of Interior, Division of Subsistence Homesteads, "General Information Concerning the Purposes and Policies of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads," Circular 1 (1933), 3.

noticeably larger, but still containing only about 750 square feet of space. The three five-room designs--Types 501, 502, and 503--had L-shaped plans. Types 501 and 503 had about 815 square feet, while Type 502 was larger, with about 835 square feet. The six-room plan, Type 601, had the same footprint as 502, but squeezed a child's bedroom into the attic above the ell, giving it a total of four bedrooms.

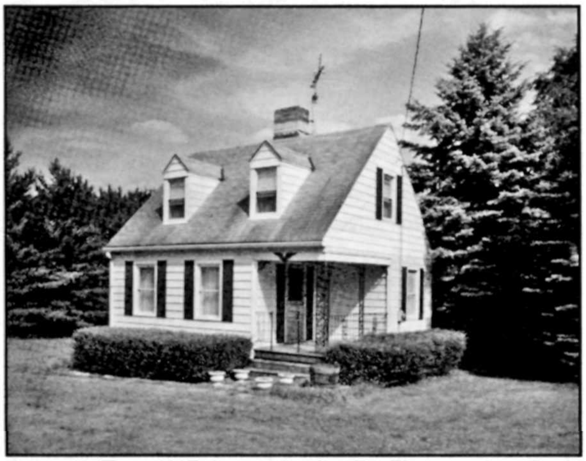
Figure 7 Type 401R house, Section B. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

All the designs included a bathroom, located on the first or second floor. None had a dining room, but the kitchen was large enough to eat in. The living room was centrally located, with direct entrance from the outside, so that it formed part of the circulation pattern. The rear entry opened into a utility room or hallway, so that muddy shoes could be shed in a neutral place. In the five- and six-room plans, there was a bedroom on the first floor. As children grew up and left home, this downstairs bedroom was often converted to a dining room or sitting room, or was opened into the living room to make that room larger. The second-floor bedrooms had separate access from the hall, except in the six-room plan, where the "child's room" with steep sloping ceilings was reached through another bedroom.

The houses were equipped with heat, water, and electricity. The concrete basement contained the hot-air furnace, which had ducts leading to floor registers, and a coal bin for its fuel. Water was piped in from an artesian well, and electricity was provided by the local public utility. These were additional costs for the occupant, as was the telephone. Because telephone-installation costs were high, most families used the telephone at the community building.

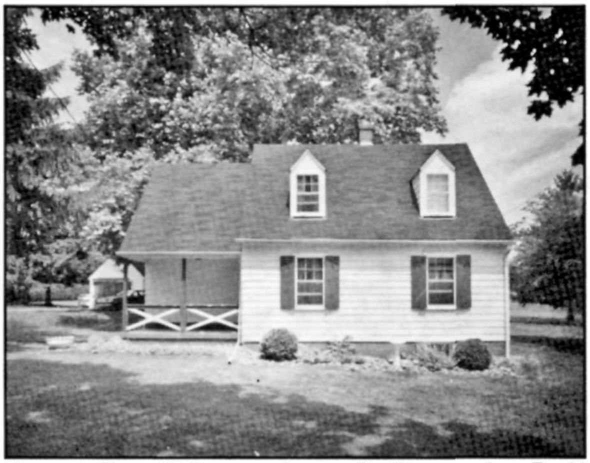
Figure 8 Type 601R house, Section B. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

Families were assigned houses on the basis of how many children they had. Mary and Anthony Wolk had three children when they applied to live in Westmoreland Homesteads and so qualified for a five-room house. When their fourth child was born, the Wolks moved to a six-room house. Comparing her former residence, one side of a semi-detached house in Whitney, to her six-room Norvelt home, Mary Wolk remarked, "Oh, my company house couldn't stand along side this. It's so private. Our neighbors are so far that we have privacy, but close enough if you need anything. To us, it was a heaven. We never had an inside bathroom."[10]

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[10] Mary Wolk.

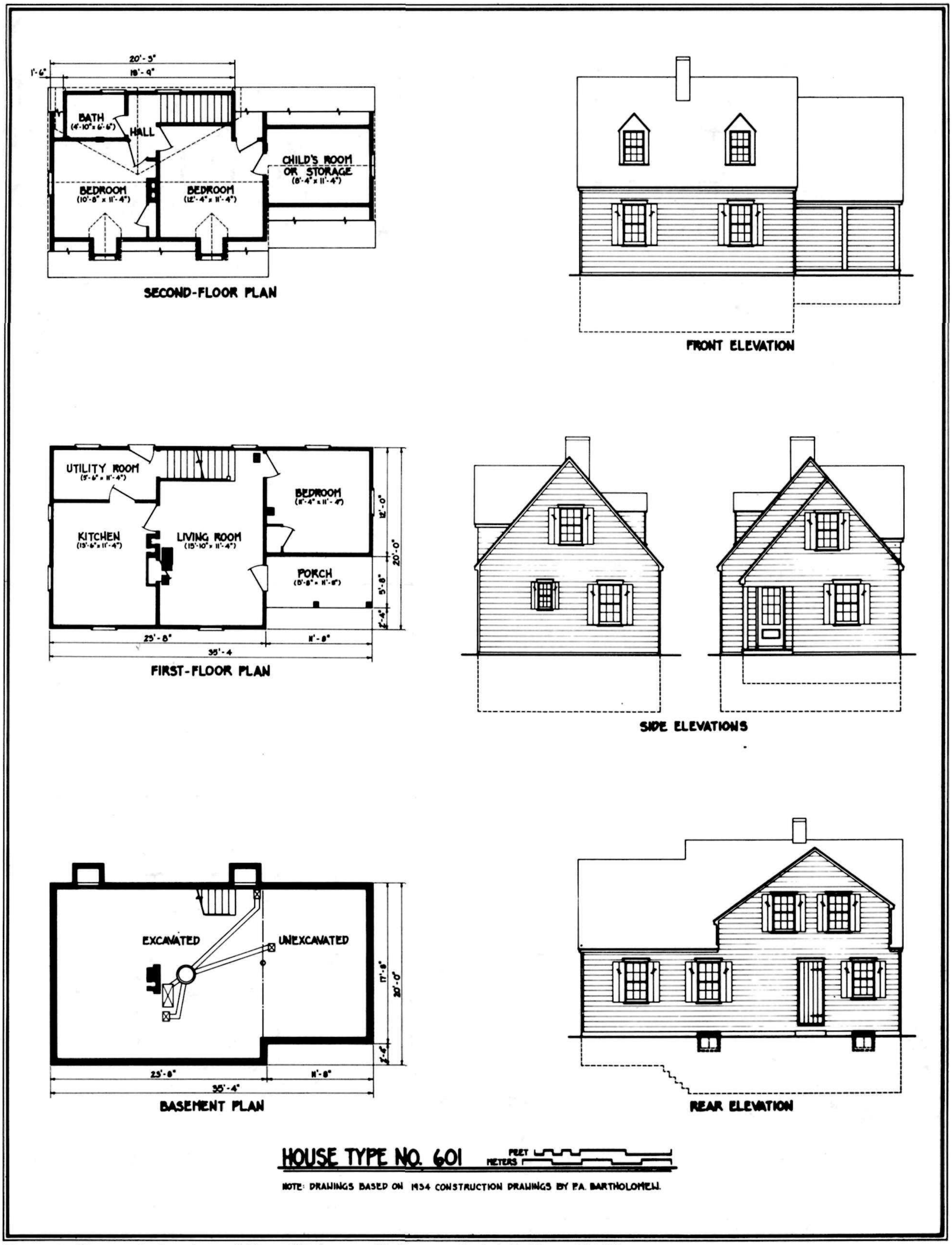
20'-3"
1'-6"
19'-9"
BATH
(4'-10" x 6'-6")
HALL
CHILD'S ROOM
OR STORAGE
(8'-4" x 11'-4")
BEDROOM
(10'-8" x 11'-4")
BEDROOM
(12'-4" x 11'-4")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
FRONT ELEVATION
UTILITY ROOM
(5'-6" x 11'-4")
BEDROOM
(11'-4" x 11'-4")
KITCHEN
(13'-6" x 11'-4")
LIVING ROOM
(15'-10" x 11'-4")
PORCH
(5'-8" x 11'-8")
12'-0"
20'-0"
5'-8"
2'-4"
23'-8"
11'-8"
35'-4
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
SIDE ELEVATIONS
EXCAVATED
UNEXCAVATED
17'-8"
20'-0"
2'-4"
23'-8"
11'-8"
35'-4"
BASEMENT PLAN
REAR ELEVATION
HOUSE TYPE NO. 601
FEET
METERS
NOTE: DRAWINGS BASED ON 1934 CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS BY P.A. BARTHOLOMEW.

Figure 9 Plans and elevations of Type 601 house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

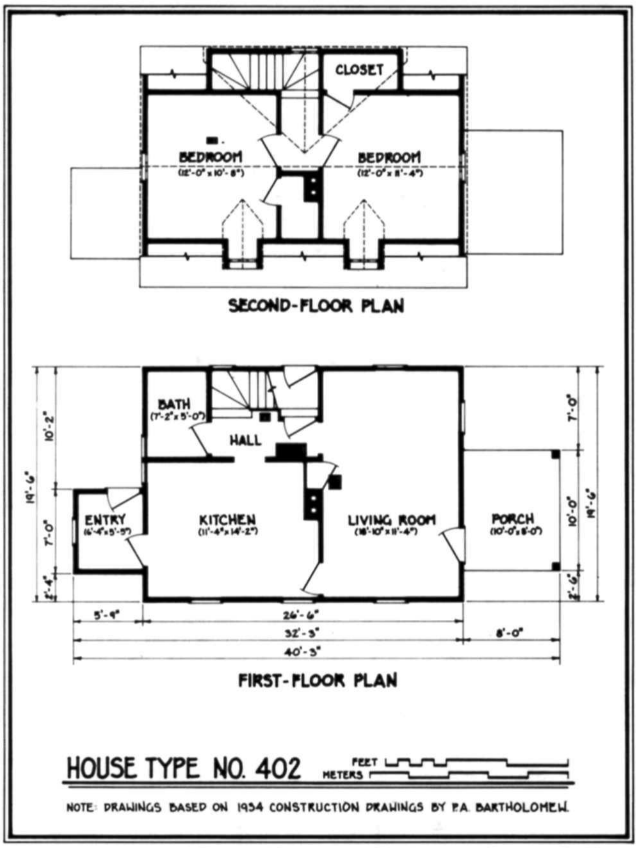
CLOSET
BEDROOM
(12'-0" x 10'-8")
BEDROOM
(12'-0" x 11'-4")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
BATH
(7'-2" x 5'-0")
HALL
ENTRY
(6'-4" x 5'-5")
KITCHEN
(11'-4" x 14'-2")
LIVING ROOM
(18'-10" x 11'-4")
PORCH
(10'-0" x 8'-0")
10'-2"
19'-6"
7'-0"
2'-4"
7'-0"
10'-0"
19'-6"
2'-6"
5'-4"
26'-6"
32'-3"
8'-0"
40'-3"
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
HOUSE TYPE NO. 402
FEET
METERS
NOTE: DRAWINGS BASED ON 1934 CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS BY P.A. BARTHOLOMEW.

Figure 10 Plans of Type 402 house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

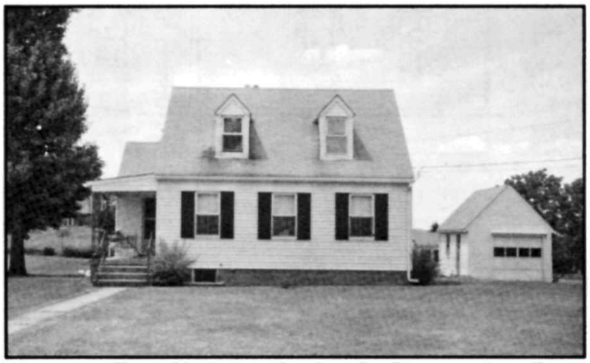

Figure 12 Type 501 house, Section C. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

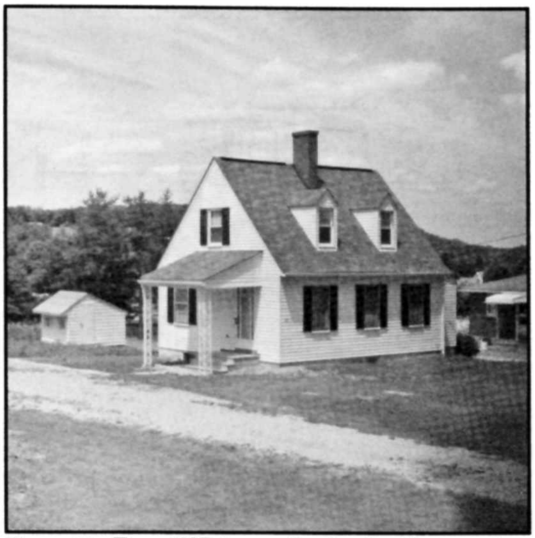

Figure 11 Type 402R house, Section B. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

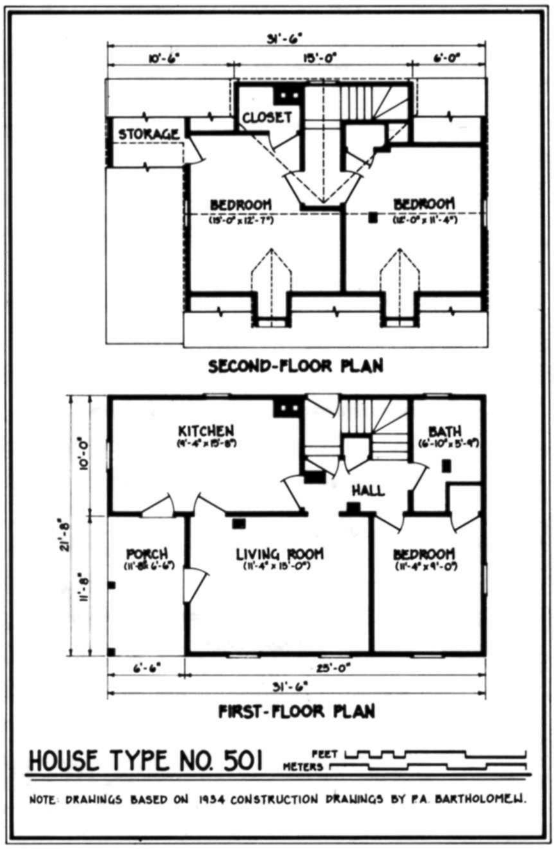
31'-6"
10'-6"
15'-0"
6'-0"
CLOSET
STORAGE
BEDROOM
(15'-0" x 12'-7")
BEDROOM
(12'-0" x 11'-4")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
KITCHEN
(9'-4" x 15'-8")
BATH
(6'-10" x 5'-9")
HALL
PORCH
(11'-8" x 6'-6")
LIVING ROOM
(11'-4" x 15'-0")
BEDROOM
(11'-4" x 9'-0")
10'-0"
21'-8"
11'-8"
6'-6"
25'-0"
31'-6"
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
HOUSE TYPE NO. 501
FEET
METERS
NOTE: DRAWINGS BASED ON 1934 CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS BY P.A. BARTHOLOMEW.

Figure 13 Plans of Type 501 house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

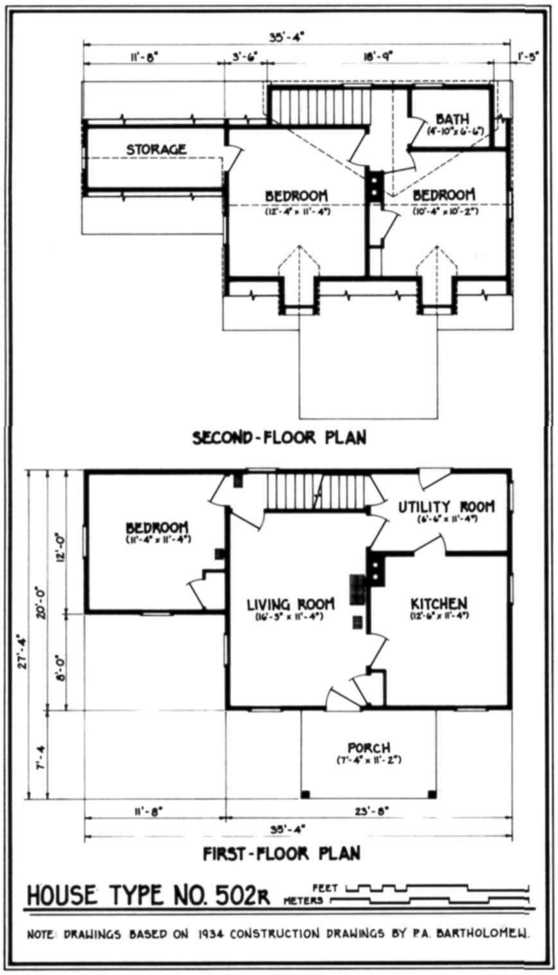
35'-4"
11'-8"
3'-6"
18'-9"
1'-5"
STORAGE
BATH
(4'-10"x 6'-6")
BEDROOM
(12'-4" x 11'-4")
BEDROOM
(10'-4" x 10'-2")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
BEDROOM
(11'-4" x 11'-4")
UTILITY ROOM
(6'-6" x 11'-4")
LIVING ROOM
(16'-3" x 11'-4")
KITCHEN
(12'-6" x 11'-4")
PORCH
(7'-4" x 11'-2")
12'-0"
20'-0"
27'-4"
8'-0"
7'-4
11'-8"
23'-8"
35'-4"
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
HOUSE TYPE NO. 502R
FEET
METERS
NOTE: DRAWINGS BASED ON 1934 CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS BY P.A. BARTHOLOMEW.

Figure 14 Plans of Type 502R house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

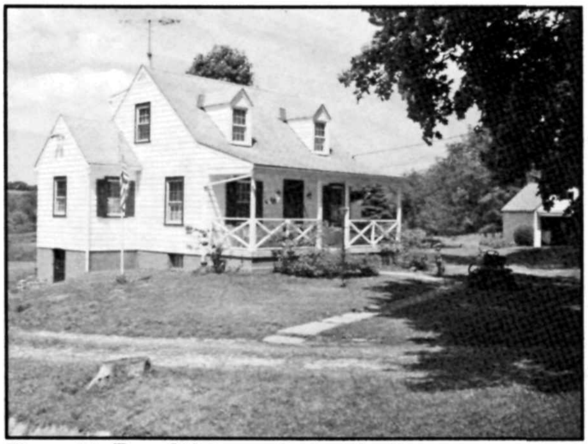

Figure 16 Type 503 house, Section E. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

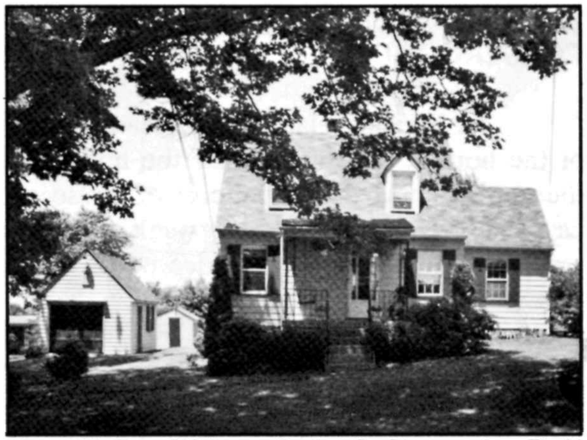

Figure 15 Type 502 house, Section C. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

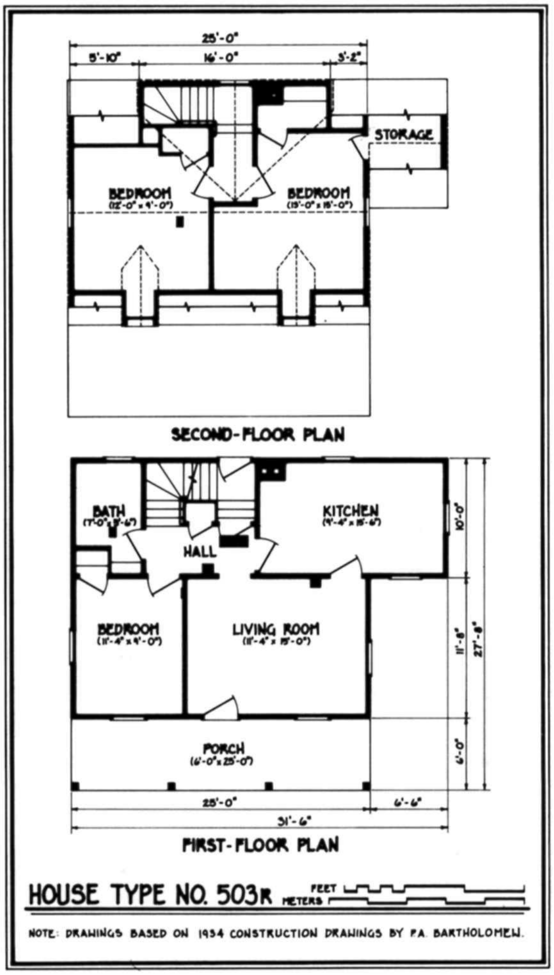
25'-0"
5'-10"
16'-0"
3'-2"
STORAGE
BEDROOM
(12'-0" x 9'-0")
BEDROOM
(13'-0" x 15'-0")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
BATH
(7'-0"x 5'-6")
HALL
KITCHEN
(9'-4" x 15'-6")
BEDROOM
(11'-4" x 9'-0")
LIVING ROOM
(11'-4" x 15'-0")
PORCH
(6'-0"x 25'-0")
10'-0"
11'-8"
27'-8"
6'-0"
25'-0"
6'-6"
31'-6"
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
HOUSE TYPE NO. 503R
FEET
METERS
NOTE: DRAWINGS BASED ON 1934 CONSTRUCTION DRAWINGS BY P.A. BARTHOLOMEW.

Figure 17 Plans of Type 503R house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

CONSTRUCTION

At Westmoreland Homesteads, the future homesteaders participated in the construction of the houses. In this manner the homesteader's labor was treated as equity on the property, thereby reducing the actual cost of house and land. A man was expected to contribute three days' labor to the project per week. The homesteaders earned $4 to $5 in cash one day, and credit toward the purchase price of the home during the other two. The men were aided in the construction work by a ten-man government engineering and administrative force and fifty volunteer college students sent by the AFSC each summer.[11]

The selection of home sites and construction of houses at the Westmoreland County homestead were under way by April 1934. According to a local newspaper, the government had established a workshop on the property for carpentry, iron working, tin smithing, and other trades "useful in the erection and upkeep of subsistence homes." This workshop was located in an old garage behind the farmhouse, which served as the construction office. The office at Westmoreland Homesteads reported directly to the main construction office in Washington for materials, timekeeping, and paychecks. S. Howard Pennell of the AFSC in Philadelphia was brought in from Arthurdale to supervise the shop, where homesteaders made shutters, window and door frames, and cupboards. The builders took advantage of the number of houses being

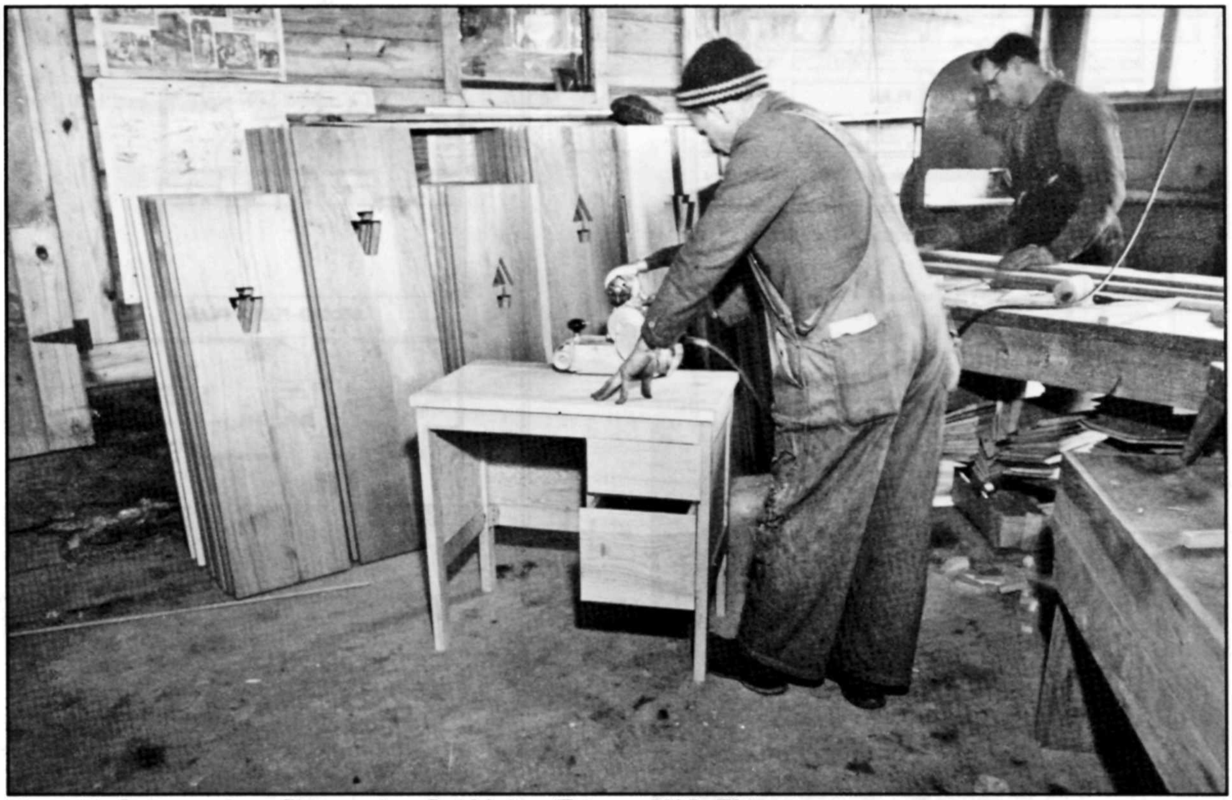

Figure 18 Carpenter shop. Photographer: Carl Mydans (February 1936), FSA.

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[11] Greensburg Morning Review, 2 August 1934.

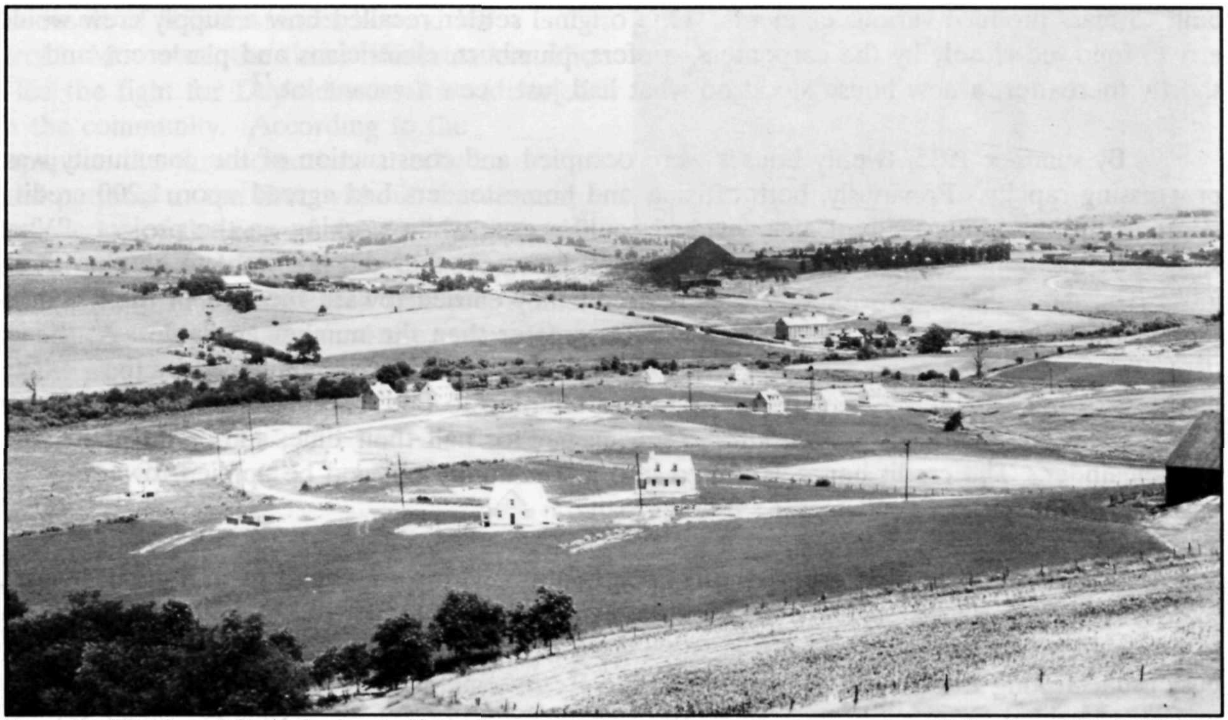

Figure 19 West Laurel Circle, Section A. Note adjacent coal mine and boney pile. Photographer: Walker Evans (July 1935), FSA.

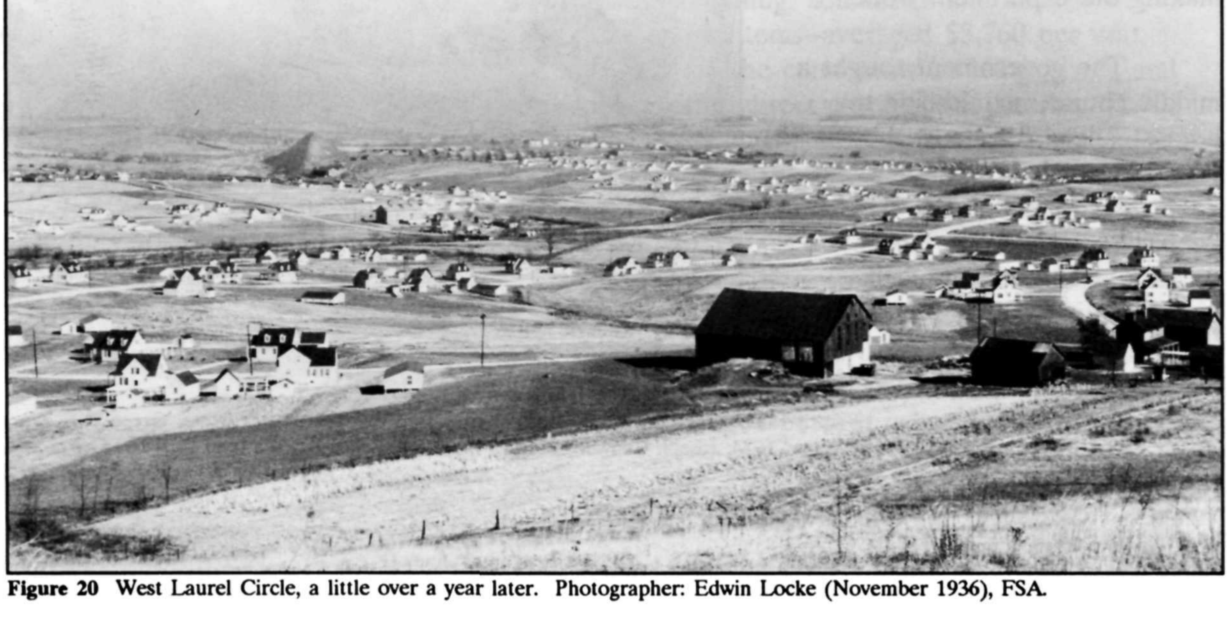

Figure 20 West Laurel Circle, a little over a year later. Photographer: Edwin Locke (November 1936), FSA.

built to mass produce various elements. One original settler recalled how a supply crew would arrive, followed closely by the carpenters, roofers, plumbers, electricians and plasterers, and shortly thereafter, a new house stood on what had just been a vacant lot.[12]

By summer 1935, twenty houses were occupied and construction of the community was progressing rapidly. Previously, both officials and homesteaders had agreed upon 1,200 credit hours as the maximum amount an individual could accrue while working on the project. When several of the homesteaders reached that amount, however, they did not want to give up their jobs. The more the men worked, the more credit they earned toward the cost of their homes. On the other hand, the demand for jobs was far greater than the number available. At the time, 228 families had been accepted, but only 100 family heads were employed by the homestead.[13] Community Manager David Day attempted to find a solution that did not involve lay-offs: the men should go on working, receiving pay for half their time, and credit hours for the remainder. The credit hours would go into a community pot and be applied toward payment of the project's outstanding federal loan.

At that, the situation erupted into open conflict, with settlers and management divided. Many vehemently protested Day's decision, demanding not only to receive a full day's wage, but to be paid the prevailing rate of 50 cents an hour for unskilled labor. Officials in Washington, busy orchestrating transfer of the division to the Resettlement Administration, turned a deaf ear to Westmoreland County. Frustrated by the lack of response, the homesteaders finally sent three representatives to Washington with a petition calling for Day's dismissal. Local newspapers publicized the conflict: "One For All Theory Fails to Work Out in County Experiment"; "Homesteaders Demand Prevailing Wage, Ask Tugwell To Fire Day."[14] Day, meanwhile, maintained that he was merely a "scapegoat for the settlers," and that the problem was simply a result of the stress of making the experiment work.

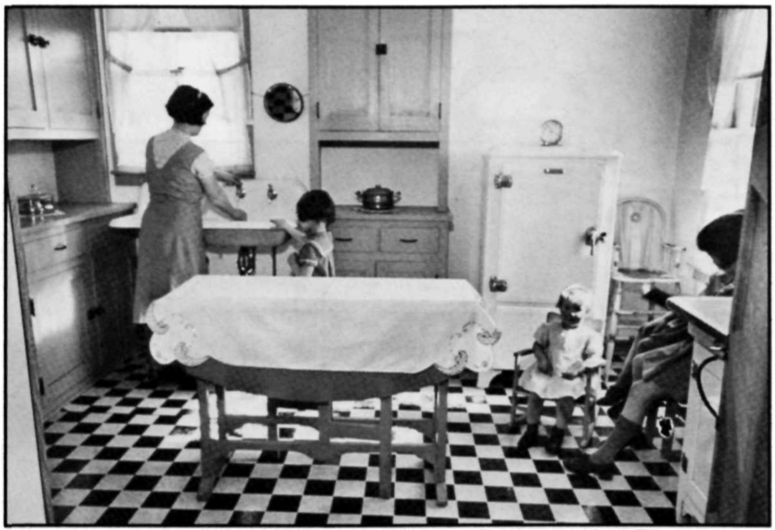
Figure 21 Kitchen. Photographer: Carl Mydans (February 1936), FSA.

The government sought a middle course, acquiescing to homesteaders' demands; they would be paid more money and keep their jobs, but Day would keep his job, as well. The division absolved Day of all blame, stating that the situation was a result of "circumstances beyond his control." Moreover, the three homesteaders who had led the fight for Day's dismissal were ousted from the community. According to the newspapers, the threesome had attached a second petition to the first, without the consent or knowledge of the rest of the community,which made "unsubstantiated charges" against Day. Although the problem appeared resolved, similar disagreements between Day and the cooperative specialist would eventually force the division to dismiss Day in November 1936.[15]

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[12] Greensburg Morning Review, 13 April 1934; "Our Community Booster Day," 4; Fifty Years of Progress; Greensburg Morning Review, 13 April 1934, 20 April 1934, 2 August 1934; Joseph Conwill, "Back to the Land! Pennsylvania's New Deal Era Communities," Pennsylvania Heritage 10 (Summer 1984): 14.

[13] Greensburg Morning Review, 8 June 1935.

[14] Greensburg Morning Review, 8 June 1935.

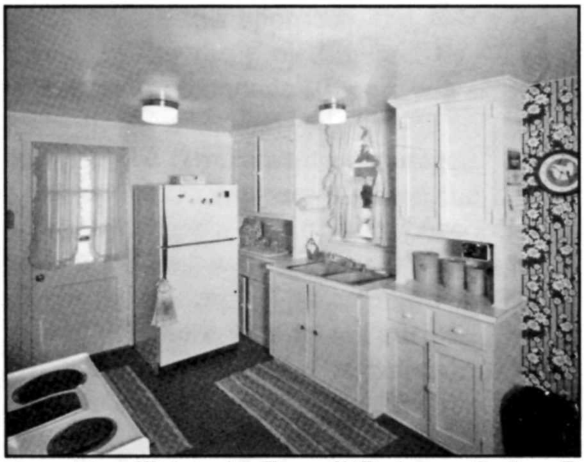
Figure 22 Kitchen in Type 601R house, Section E. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

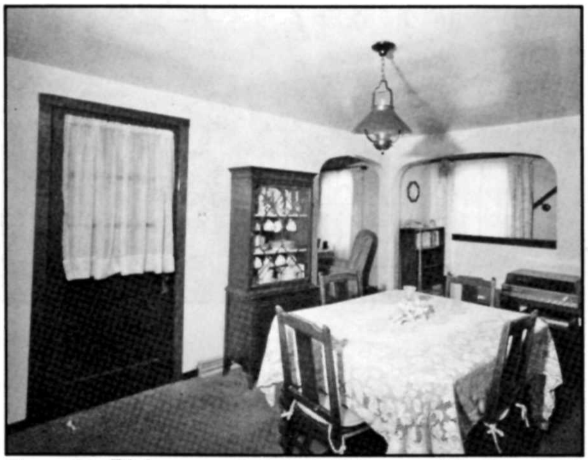
Figure 23 Dining room (originally living room) in Type 601R house, Section E. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

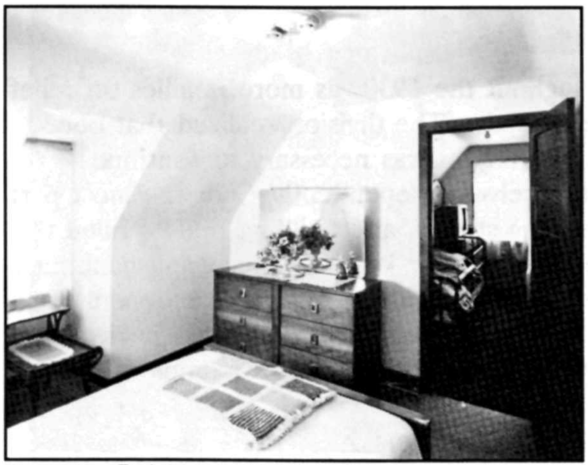
Figure 24 Bedroom, looking into child's room, Type 601R house, Section E. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

Although one of the primary concerns with construction was to keep costs down, the houses at Norvelt were more expensive than both the government and the homesteaders desired. Because the final cost of the houses could not be determined until construction was complete, homesteaders were permitted to occupy and rent their houses, with an option to buy, once the purchase price had been set. Rents--which were $12.65 per month for a four-room house, $13.50 for a five-room, and $14.33 for a six-room--would be credited against the purchase price. The cost of the farmsteads--including land, houses, utilities, and credit hours paid as cash, as well as indirect costs of planning, administration, and construction items--averaged $3,760 per unit. The cost of the community buildings, land, and roads, with indirect costs, added another $2,763 per unit. The homesteaders were unable to afford this, so the sale price was based on what they could afford to pay. A projected annual income of $1,000 was partly provided by the subsistence garden, so that the annual cash income was estimated at $850. One-fourth of this, $212.50 (or $17.70 per month), was thought a fair price for mortgage payments, which over forty years at 3 percent interest came to

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[15] Greensburg Morning Review, 11 June 1935, 15 June 1935; Miscellaneous correspondence from David Day, Indiana, to the AFSC, Philadelphia, Pa., AFSC Archives.

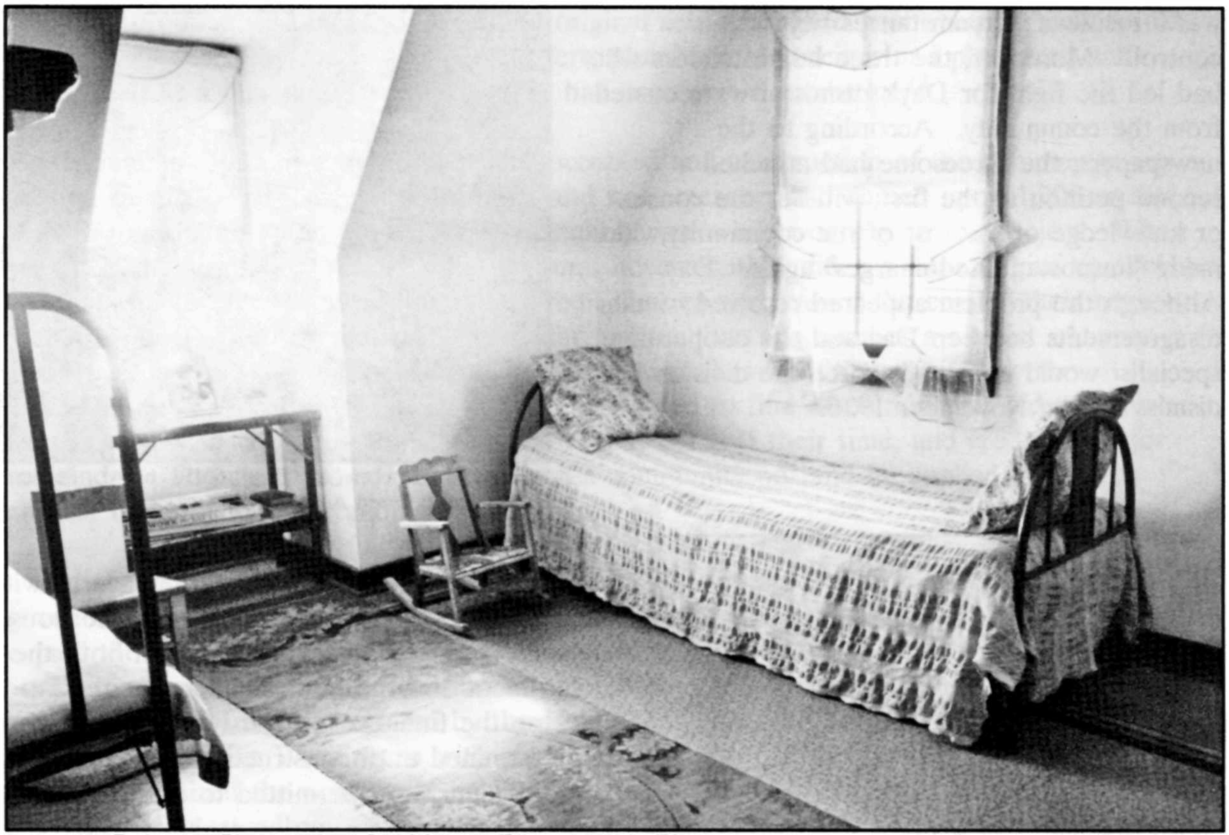

Figure 25 Bedroom. Photographer: Carl Mydans (February 1936), FSA.

$2,131.28 that the government would receive for its houses. Thus only about one-third of the cost of the homesteads would be recouped.[16]

THE COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

Employment problems were exacerbated throughout the 1930s as more families on relief continued to apply for houses at Westmoreland Homesteads. The division realized that once accepted, families on relief could not be cut off immediately; it was necessary to continue financial aid until the homesteaders could support themselves independently. For the most part, employment on the project, such as clearing land, grading streets, and building houses filled the bill. By working on the project, homesteaders were earning their keep, not receiving handouts. As only 40 percent of the heads of household had outside employment, most were dependent on construction work as their livelihood. As the division explained, "Every effort is made in this work to develop skills formerly not possessed by the homesteaders and to complete worthwhile community developments and improvements."[17] With this approach, the government stressed self-sufficiency from the beginning of the project. But as the project neared completion, it became obvious to officials that another means of economic support was needed.

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[16] "Our Community Booster Day," 15; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Resettlement Administration, Resettlement Division, "Justification for Westmoreland Homesteads, SH-PA-3" (26 May 1937), Box 51, Public Housing Administration, Record Group 207, National Archives.

Although not intended as the sole source of income, the government encouraged subsistence gardens. Each homestead contained between one and seven acres where the family was expected to raise its own vegetables, fruit, poultry, and perhaps a cow or hog. According to homesteader Mary Wolk, "It was possible to live off the gardens and chickens. We did it until things picked up and the men went back to work [in the mines]." The emphasis was to be on home consumption, not market sale, although some families were able to sell surplus. Homesteader Agnes Whisdosh, for instance, drove to Latrobe every morning to sell extra produce. Chickens were considered another element of the subsistence program, for the hens and eggs could be consumed and sold but, "Nothing was free. Not even the chickens." Repayment for the chickens began when they reached maturity. Each family had a chicken coop and twenty-five to fifty chicks as part of the total homestead package. Baby chicks were raised on the farm in a chicken range billed as the "largest commercial poultry plant in Pennsylvania," and then distributed to each family.[18]

The Westmoreland Homesteads Cooperative Association, later known as Westmoreland Homesteads Community Enterprises, Inc., was created as part of the federal government's plan

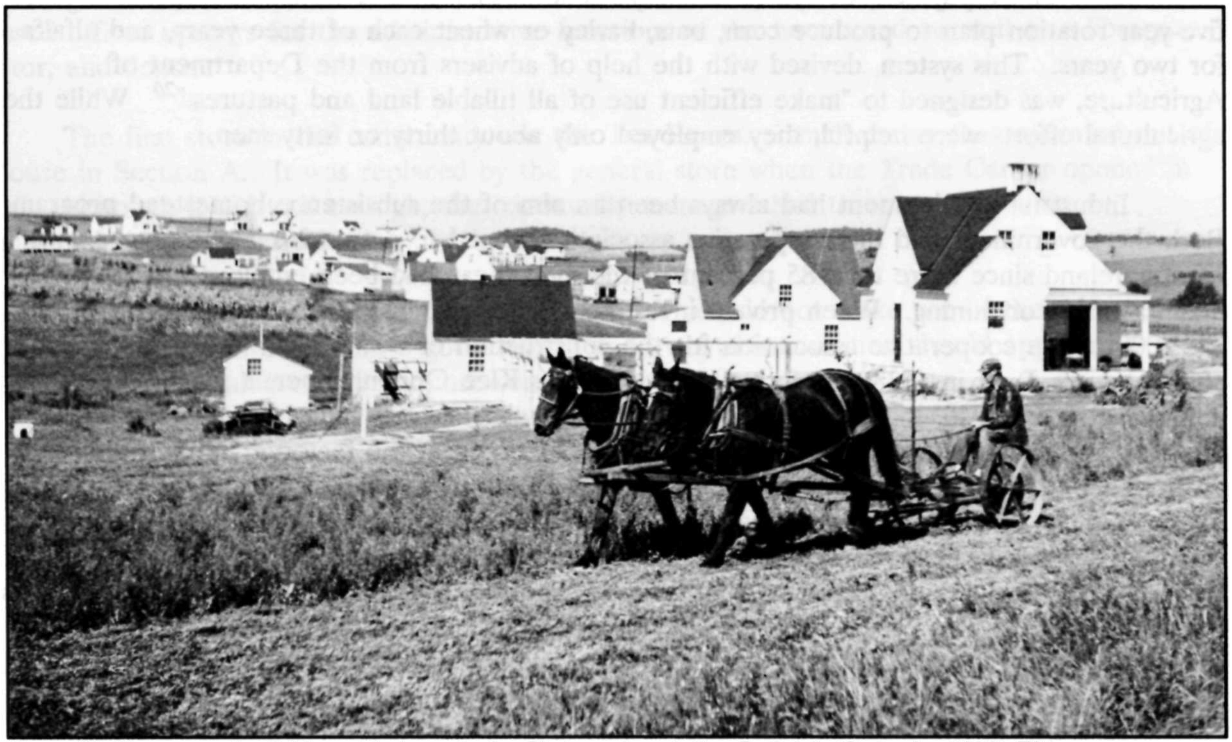

Figure 26 Horses mowing fields next to homesteads. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein (September 1936), FSA.

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[17] Circular 1, 11; "Justification"; Beckwith, 7.

[18] Mary Wolk; "Our Community Booster Day," 9.

to provide employment for the community. Organized as an affiliation of all homesteaders, the purpose of the Community Association was to establish agricultural and community trading facilities. By lending the association $370,000 for the establishment of business activities, the government could indirectly provide employment, and thus fulfill its goal of economic rehabilitation.[19]

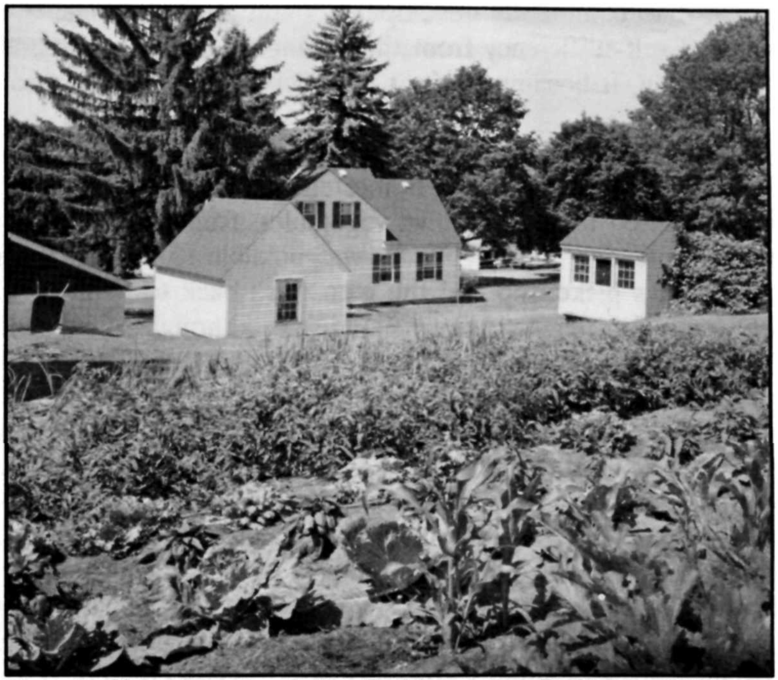

Figure 27 Vegetable garden, Section E. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

The cooperative association operated a hog farm, beef farm, and dairy barn that sold fresh meat, dairy and poultry products to outside firms on a contract basis. All the money raised went back into the farm for maintenance and repayment of the community's federal loans. The farm itself operated on a five-year rotation plan to produce corn, oats, barley or wheat each of three years, and alfalfa for two years. This system, devised with the help of advisers from the Department of Agriculture, was designed to "make efficient use of all tillable land and pastures."[20] While these agricultural efforts were helpful, they employed only about thirty or forty men.

Industrial development had always been an aim of the subsistence homestead program. Both the government and the cooperative association hoped to draw manufacturers to Westmoreland since more than 85 percent of the men there had been employed in manufacturing or mining. When private investment failed to materialize, the government lent $325,000 to the cooperative association for the construction of a small garment factory in the community.[21] Built in 1938, the factory was leased to Klee Oppenheimer, a manufacturer of men's pants. By 1940, the factory employed 150 women and forty men. Mary Wolk, an experienced seamstress, was one of the women who worked at the factory. Since it operated on a piecework system, "Some people called it a sweatshop," Wolk said, "But it was wonderful for the people. It helped us a lot." Betty Somers went to work in 1941 when her husband went off to war; she made $12.74 a week toward rent, utilities, and the support of her two children. The pants factory enjoyed moderate success, but was replaced by several other firms over the years. Now owned by private investors, the garment factory employs approximately

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[19] Beckwith, 4.

[20] Beckwith, 4.

[21] The factory building was designed by architect Alfred H. Marks of Pittsburgh. Construction plans of subsistence homestead programs, 1933-37, microfilm reel 18, Records of the Public Housing Administration, Record Group 196, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

450 people from the area during peak-production periods.[22]

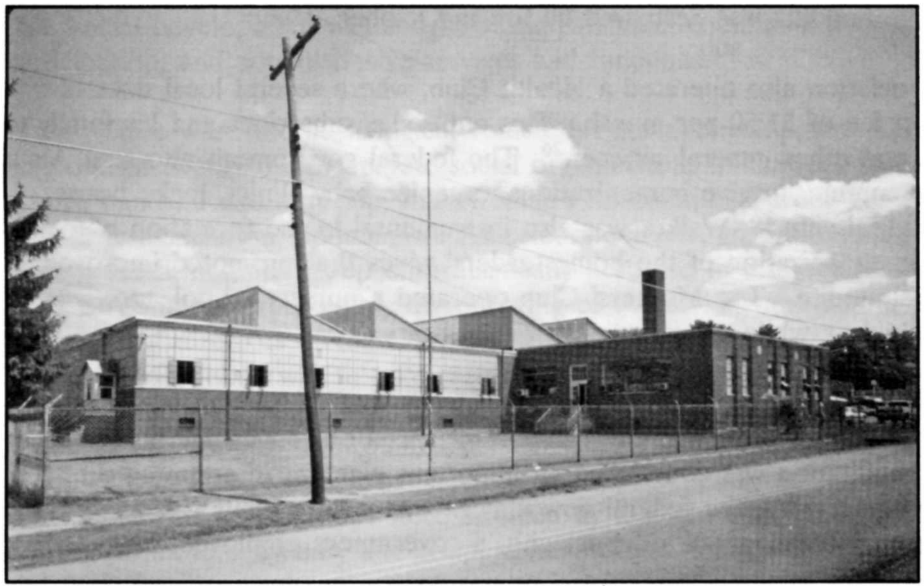

Figure 28 Garment factory. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

The Cooperative Association also built a one-and-a-half-story brick community building called the Trade Center, whose simple Colonial Revival style was described as being "in keeping with the colonial design employed on the Homestead houses." The Trade Center housed a general store, lunch counter, barber shop, and beauty parlor. Except for the store, which was a cooperative, the operation of these ventures was leased to individuals. Thus Wallace Hoffer applied for the position of community barber, got his own shop, and became a homesteader in the bargain. The Trade Center also housed offices upstairs for the administrative functions of the homestead, as well as a library, doctor, and dentist.[23]

The first store in the community was the Tea Room, a small eatery that operated out of a house in Section A. It was replaced by the general store when the Trade Center opened in 1936. Although it did well enough, the community managers had to encourage some homesteaders to patronize it.

> There are . . . too many homesteaders who, as yet, do not make use of their general store. There is no good reason as to why this condition should apply, as our prices, value considered, are competitive.

And moreover,

> A good percentage of the money spent here is turned over to your own community and put to work for your benefit and convenience . . . You owe it to yourself to deal at the general store if you are not already doing so.[24]

Within a few years business at the general store was booming, and the Trade Center was the hub of the community. The building was destroyed by fire in October 1978.[25]

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[22] Mary Wolk; Betty Somers, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 30 June 1989, Norvelt; Beckwith, 7; Fifty Years of Progress.

[23] "Our Community Booster Day," 6-7; Beckwith, 5; Fifty Years of Progress.

[24] "Our Community Booster Day," 7.

The community association also operated a Health Club, where several local doctors provided medical care for a fee of $1.50 per month. This entitled a subscriber and his family to house calls, maternity aid, and other general services.[26] The federal government also sent Alma Walker, a nurse, to the community to give immunizations, organize baby clinics, make house calls, and provide basic medical care.[27] Walker was also instrumental in the formation of Norvelt's Mothers' Club, an organization of the homesteaders' wives that promoted improved nutrition, child care, and family life. The Mothers' Club operated a nursery school, too, where women could leave their children while at work.

In 1933 the division noted in reference to the homesteads that, "Although the legislation of Section 208 is directed largely to economic ends, important social objectives will be served as well." But while social rehabilitation was considered an important element in attaining the success of the subsistence homesteads, the federal government was unsure of its role in achieving that goal. Community manager Ward Beckwith, a government employee, indicated

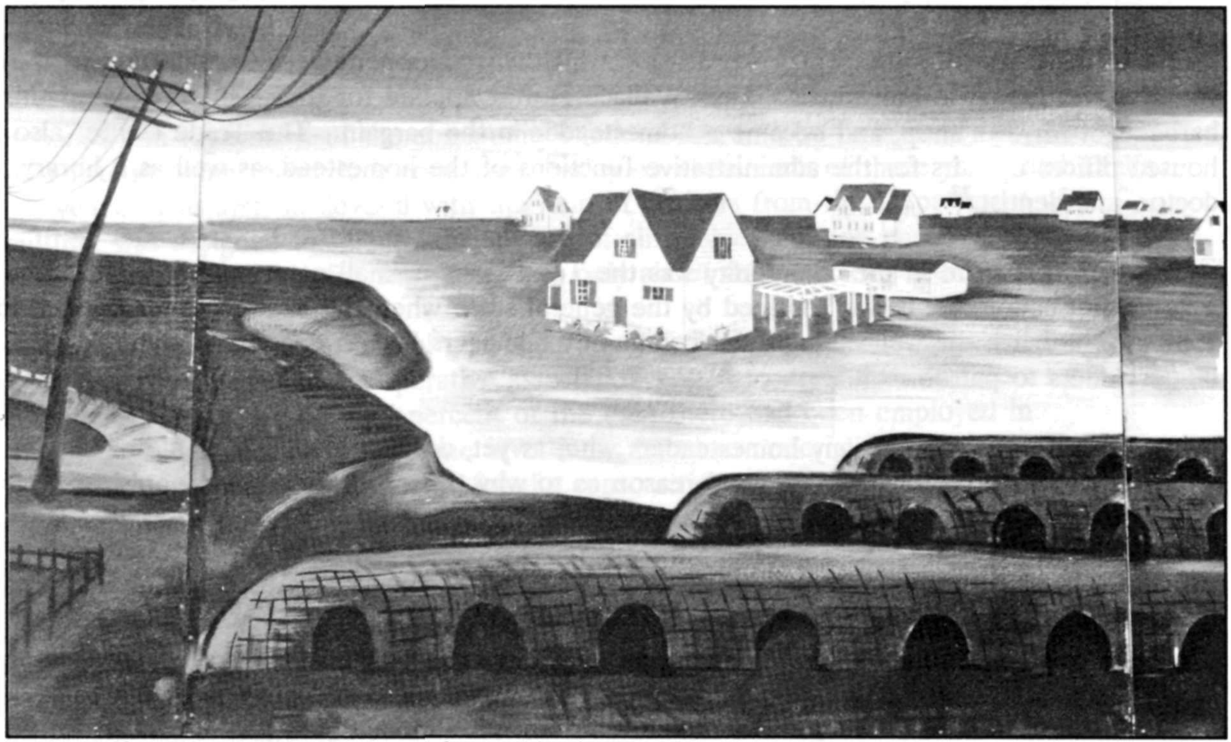

Figure 29 Norvelt houses with coke ovens in foreground, painted by a homesteader and exhibited at a fair. Photographer: Arthur Rothstein (September 1936), FSA.

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[25] Fifty Years of Progress.

[26] Charles Somers, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 13 July 1989, Harrisonburg, Va.

[27] Fifty Years of Progress.

that "social development was sought along two main courses of action, group initiative and participation, and administrative services and functions."[28]

Clubs were the most logical vehicle for social development. The Mothers' Club was only one of twenty-three separate social organizations in Norvelt, including Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, bands, a choral group, the Fireman's Association, Parent-Teacher Association, health club, civic association, Sportsman's Association, church groups, and athletic clubs. There was even "a small, militant group enthusiastically occupied in disagreeing with the policies of the administration, and thoroughly disapproving of the actions and character of the local staff and the board of directors of the Cooperative Association."[29] There were a number of committees, as well, whose job it was to take care of the burial fund, Memorial Day celebrations, movie night, Fireman's Carnival, and community fair. Annual events, the carnival and fair attracted hundreds of people from around the county.

Most of these groups were directed by the Norvelt Activities Council, whose objective was to "promote a friendly and cooperative attitude among all organizations, all homesteaders and their families, and to conduct any business which might be brought before it of a community nature." To achieve full community cooperation, the council included two representatives from each organization or committee, and one representative from each housing section, "except Section A, which gets two because of its size."[30]

From the government's point of view, these organizations were also important for developing "democratic practices" and providing "excellent channels for leadership training, the inculcation of community ideals, and the establishing of patterns of social and recreational activity." The concept that stranded industrial workers lacked social skills was based, to a large extent, on numerous studies of miners, lumbermen, and other groups conducted by federal and private agencies in the 1920s. These studies went a long way toward confirming what social reformers suspected: communities dependent upon one industry and one company for their economic livelihood were not conducive to developing the skills individuals needed to be good citizens. The homestead program intended to fill that perceived social void. As the division explained, the "intensive social and community life" of Westmoreland Homesteads was "one of the most important developments towards the establishment of a pattern of life on a higher plane than is enjoyed by most communities."[31]

COMPLETION AND CONTINUITY

During construction a number of people came to visit and inspect the work in progress, including members of the AFSC, government officials, the Secretary of Agriculture, and a host of others. But the most significant visit occurred after all 254 houses were completed, on May

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[28] Circular No. 1, 5; Beckwith, 7.

[29] Beckwith, 7.

[30] "Norvelt Activities Council By-Laws," undated, possession of Charles Somers, Harrisonburg, VA.

[31] Beckwith, 7, 8.

21, 1937. On that date, in a whirlwind tour planned by various officials of the community, Eleanor Roosevelt and a party of eleven visited typical houses belonging to the Kelley, Riddle, Miller, and Terney families of Section E. Next, Roosevelt visited the school, where she spoke with the local children, including young Anthony Wolk, Jr. Then it was on to the cooperative farm, the dairy barn, chicken range, store, and factory. And then she went up and down the streets, stopping periodically and emerging from the big, black Cadillac to speak with homesteaders. At one point, the First Lady made a special detour to Helen White's house in Section D. "Mrs. Roosevelt came," said White, "To see how I was getting along." And so it went for most of the day. When it was over, the First Lady remarked, "[The community] is very well planned and the homes are well constructed. The homes are a great deal better than many I have seen." While impressed with the physical appearance of the place, Roosevelt and others were concerned about the lack of employment and educational opportunities for young people. Within a year of her visit, the community had a new school building and a factory. In fall 1937, when the new post office at Westmoreland Homesteads needed a name, the local newsletter "The Homestead Informer" held a contest. The winning entry was NORVELT, derived from the last syllables of the First Lady's name, in gratitude for her continued interest and support.[32]

By the 1940s, the government was under increased pressure to sell off its subsistence homesteads. In 1944, Norvelt was turned over to the Federal Public Housing Authority, which sold it to the Homestead Association of Westmoreland on December 1, 1945. The Homestead Association sold all of the units to individual homesteaders by June 30, 1946. Responding to criticisms of the program, Walter Funkhouser, Norvelt's last community manager, reminded neighboring Westmoreland County residents that homesteads were an experimental means of achieving economic rehabilitation of industrial workers, but not the only means. "Who can say what it is worth to put a project of this kind in a mining

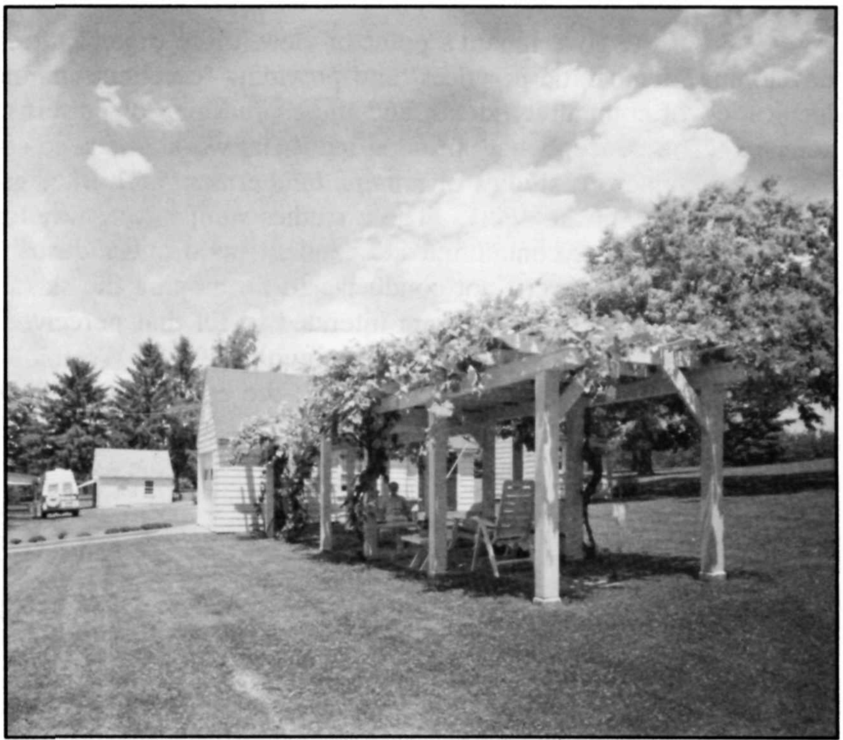

Figure 30 Original homesteader Mary Wolk in her arbor, Section B. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

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[32] Greensburg Morning Review, 21 May 1937; Greensburg Tribune Review 16 December 1984; Fifty Years of Progress.

community as a demonstration of a new way of life?" he asked.[33] With a waiting list of fifty families who wanted homesteads, Funkhouser and others considered the community a moderate success, but whether the government would ever attempt such an experiment again seemed doubtful to all.

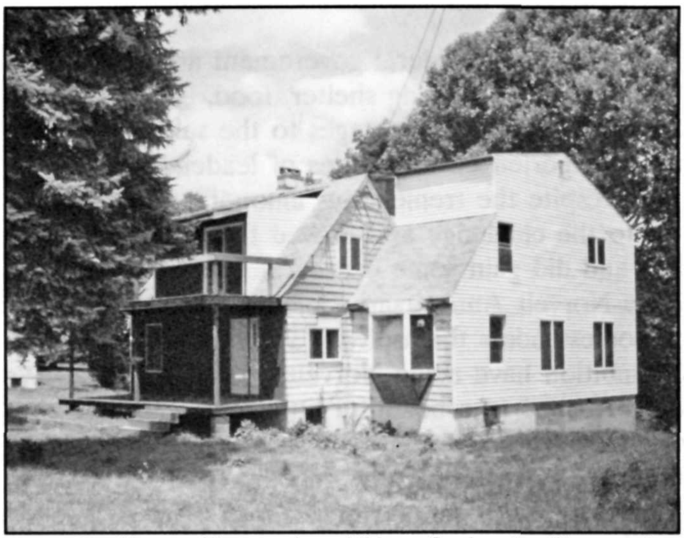

Figure 31 House with extensive additions, Section A. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

Various changes have been made to Norvelt in the past fifty years. By 1952 the cooperatives were gone, including the poultry and dairy farms. The town's appearance has been somewhat altered, as well, with macadam streets, additions to houses, property subdivisions, and completely new structures. The growth of trees and shrubbery has produced a leafy, appealing neighborhood. Although there are some vegetable gardens, the focus now seems to be on ornamental gardens, as cultivated flower beds decorate many of the yards. The old high school building has been converted to offices, the old construction office is a funeral home, and numerous businesses have sprung up along the main road.

Most notable are the numbers of new houses, testifying to the popularity of Norvelt. Many are constructed between the old houses, and others on lots behind the original houses. New subdivisions on the edges of Norvelt also illustrate the community's attraction.

Many residents, both old and new, have made changes to the small Cape Cod dwellings. After Betty and Simon Somers bought their four-room house in 1942, they enclosed the porch to create more room. "The houses were small," said Betty, "and uninsulated. They were cold, but a lot of other places were cold. We were proud of it. Don't think we weren't proud of it." Eventually, the Somerses built and moved into a large ranch house on the rear of their property, and rented the four-room house to another family. Similarly, Mary Wolk gave a portion of her three-acre property to son Joseph and his wife, Valeria, who built a house in the 1940s. Both grew up in Norvelt, "and loved it enough to stay when they got married."[34]

Other families have remained in Norvelt, as well. Jay Hoffer--whose homesteader father, Wallace, was the first barber--still lives there, as does his daughter Sandy. Steve Whisdosh, who succeeded his mother, Agnes, as Norvelt's postmaster, also divided the family homestead and built a new house behind his childhood home; the original house is occupied by his daughter.

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[33] Andrew Evancho to Arthur Taylor, 22 April 1946, and Walter L. Funkhouser to Arthur Taylor, April 16, 1946, Box 58, Federal Public Housing Authority, Record Group 207, National Archives; Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph, 29 August 1944.

[34] Betty Somers; Mary Wolk.

In establishing these demonstration communities, the federal government attempted to provide everything that was necessary for community life, including shelter, food, employment, medical care, education, and recreation. From the initial planning stages to the sale of the last house, the creators of Westmoreland Homesteads experienced difficulties of leadership, implementation, construction, and finances. But despite the tremendous amount of controversy engendered by the project, its participants rose to the challenge and proved the skeptics wrong: with help and guidance, destitute families could and did gain some degree of economic security and an improved standard of living. In 1987 the Norvelt Anniversary Committee credited two factors for the community's success. First the homesteaders themselves: "We owe so much to our homestead settlers. Their hard work and ambition have made Norvelt what it is today. We have progressed from muddy roads and a bare landscape to a beautiful little town with tall trees, neat and well-cared-for lawns, and homes that are much improved since those early days." And secondly, their greatest advocate: "A kind and thoughtful lady [who] wanted to see us succeed and become useful and self-sufficient citizens . . . Eleanor Roosevelt."[35] Not to be overlooked, however, are the planners and idealists, such as M. L. Wilson and Clarence Pickett, who conceived and implemented a bold idea in housing reform.

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[35] Fifty Years of Progress.

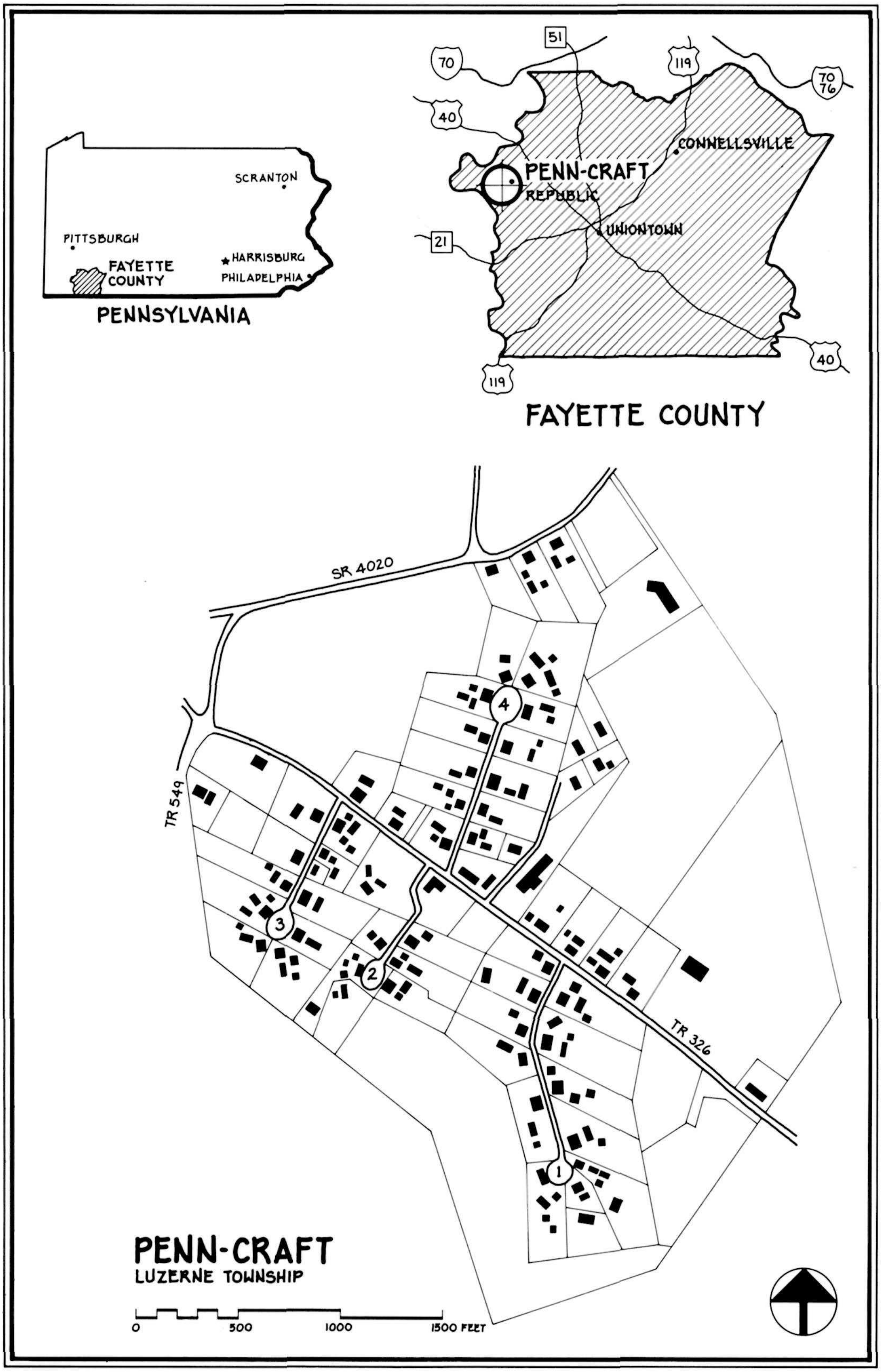
70
51
119
70 76
40
CONNELLSVILLE
PENN-CRAFT
REPUBLIC
UNIONTOWN
21
40
119
FAYETTE COUNTY
SCRANTON
PITTSBURGH
FAYETTE COUNTY
HARRISBURG
PHILADELPHIA
PENNSYLVANIA
SR 4020
TR 549
TR 326
1
2
3
4
PENN-CRAFT
LUZERNE TOWNSHIP
0
500
1000
1500 FEET

Figure 1 Site plan of Penn-Craft. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

CHAPTER 4

PENN-CRAFT

O give me a home,
Made of cement and stone,
With some neighbors to work and to play,
With chickens to tend,
And stockings to mend,
And a factory to work in all day.

Home, home with my range,
Where bread, pies, and cookies I bake,
To fill buckets for lunch,
For the men folk to munch,
In the mines far from Penn-Craft away.

O give me a home,
Made of beautiful stone,
Far away from the smoke of the mines,
With flowers and fruit,
A kind husband to boot,
And days that are filled with sunshine.[1]

As the sentiments expressed in this song suggest, Penn-Craft's fifty original homesteading families came to the community in 1937 with the hope of finding a steady job, a home of their own, and a new way of life. Clarence Pickett, executive director of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and a former deputy in the federal Division of Subsistence Homesteads, remarked:

> Anyone driving through Fayette County, Pennsylvania, in 1936, saw mountainsides covered with scrubby timber, a few active coal mines, and many shabby remnants of once prosperous mining communities. Stark rows of dilapidated shacks in lifeless mine "patches" were nearly as grim as the faces of a once industrious population, now unemployed.[2]

Having worked closely with the federal Division of Subsistence Homesteads, the AFSC saw the weaknesses of the federal projects as inflexible government regulations and procedures, and an emphasis on completion over education. Stranded miners, the Friends believed, needed much more than a temporary handout; they needed to develop new skills, both social and economic. The AFSC community would therefore place much more emphasis on rehabilitation and education than the federal program. Moreover, being smaller than most federal homesteads

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[1] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary, 1937-1947 (Penn-Craft: privately printed, 1947).

[2] Clarence Pickett, For More than Bread (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), 67.

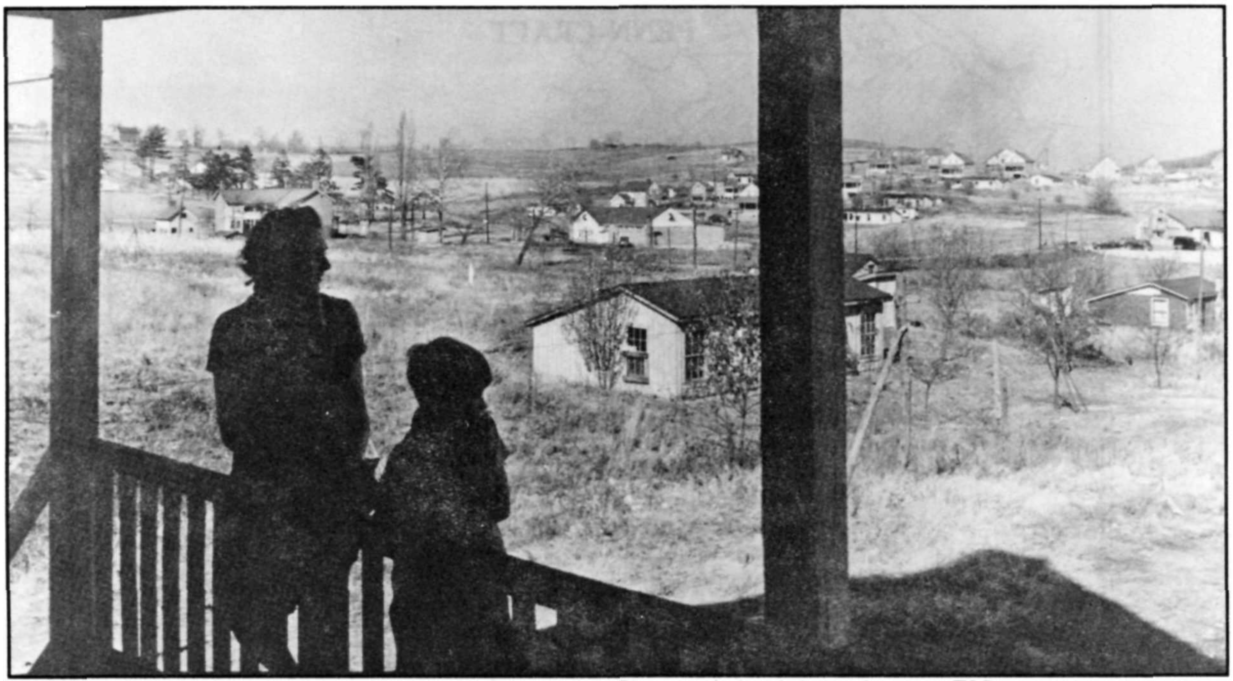

Figure 2 View of Penn-Craft, temporary house in foreground. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

and less structured, the new project would be more responsive to homesteaders' needs.

Experimental by nature, the project endeavored to serve as a model for other distressed areas of the country. Indeed, as project manager David Day stressed to the homesteaders, "We are all part of a great experiment in the world of economics and human relations. Any degree of success we attain together, shall not be for ourselves, alone, but for millions of other people." And as the homesteaders themselves concluded, "Our experience has shown that, given a fair opportunity, a group of miners or average working men banded together because of their common desire to re-establish themselves in a new environment as home owners and responsible citizens can build an up-to-date community and create a desirable place in which to live."[3] That place was Penn-Craft.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Unlike the government subsistence homesteads, Penn-Craft was privately funded. The Friends were able to raise nearly $185,000 for their experiment at Penn-Craft, $100,000 of it for a revolving fund to be replenished by the homesteaders' gradual purchase of their homes. The largest contribution--$80,000--came from the U.S. Steel Corporation, owner of many of the defunct coal and coke operations in the area. Other large contributors included the W. T. Grant Foundation ($45,000), A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust ($30,000),

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[3] Louis Orslene and Susan Shearer, "National Register Nomination: Penn-Craft Historic District" (National Park Service, 1989); Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary.

Marquette Charitable Organization ($10,000), and William C. Whitney Foundation ($9,000).[4]

When the Friends began searching for potential sites on which to implement their "great experiment," Fayette County seemed an obvious choice. The AFSC was already familiar with the plight of miners because it had conducted an extensive child-feeding program there in 1931. In addition, officials from AFSC, working under the auspices of the federal government, had looked at the county in 1933 as a potential location for a new subsistence-homestead project. But since no single site was large enough, the government homestead was located instead in Westmoreland County.[5]

At first the Friends hoped to build their cooperative community around the existing coal town of Tower Hill, a patch near Republic. Owned by the Hillman Coal and Coke Company, Tower Hill offered plenty of housing for prospective homesteaders, but the Friends could not reach an agreement with the company over the purchase price. Since Tower Hill was the only coal town for sale in the area, the AFSC called a conference in Philadelphia on September 14,

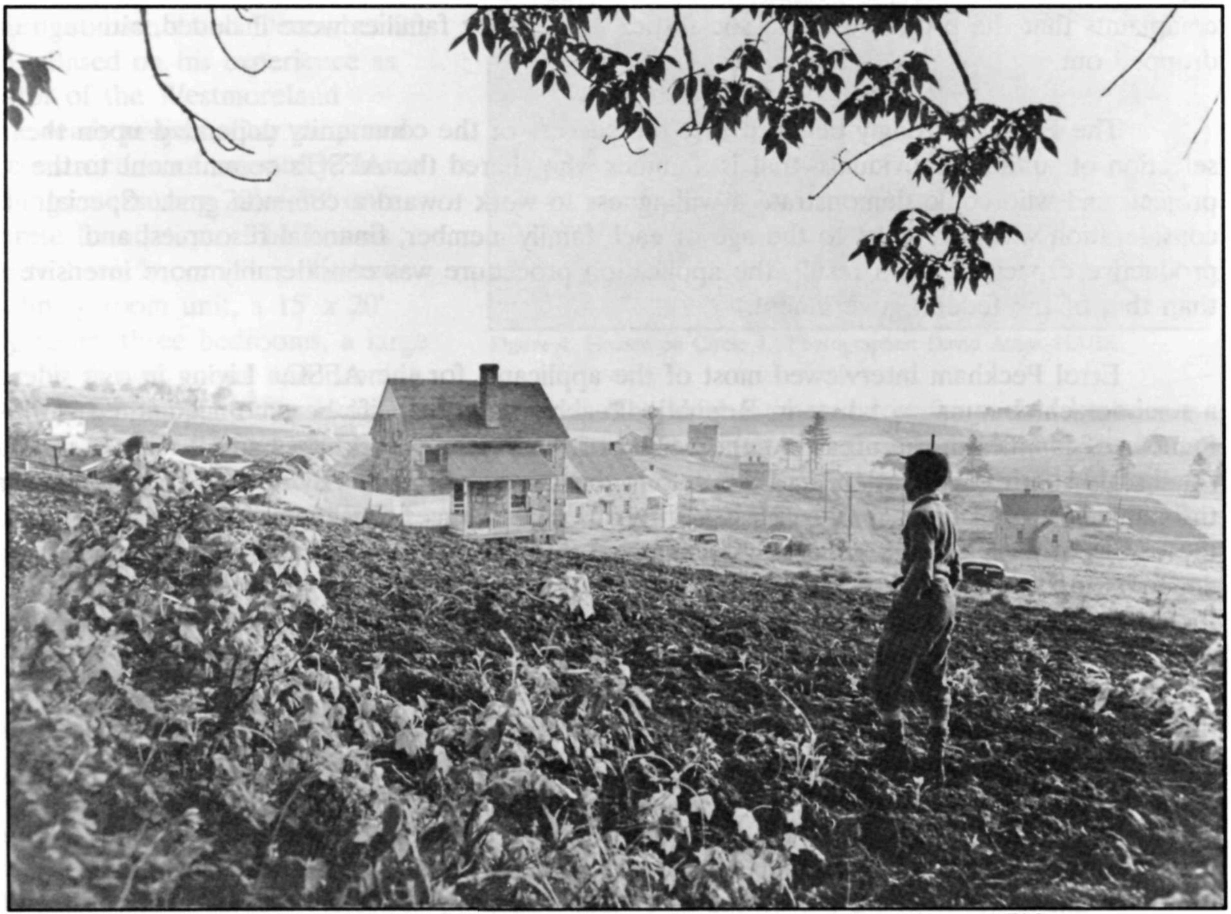

Figure 3 View of Penn-Craft, showing tilled field and stone houses. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

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[4] American Friends Service Committee, "Evaluation of Experiences at Penn-Craft During Three-Year Period 1937-1940," 26.

[5] AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 1.

1936, to discuss options. Committee members concluded that "company towns present almost insuperable obstacles to the development of an effective educational program," and presented "problems of control," as well.[6]

A committee of three scouted out suitable properties. The AFSC had sent Errol Peckham and his family to live in Republic, and Levinus K. Painter and his family to live in Brier Hill. They were joined by project manager David W. Day. With the purchase of the Isaiah N. Craft farm in Luzerne Township in March 1937, the experiment officially began.

The Craft farm was ideally located. Situated two miles west of Republic, the AFSC's local base of operations, the site was only eleven miles northwest of the county seat of Uniontown, and forty-five miles south of Pittsburgh. The farm, which comprised 200 acres, was surrounded on all sides by coal communities, some large, like Republic, others small, like Thompson No. 1--but all in need of relief. Fifty families, proportionately representing Fayette County's dominant ethnic groups, were finally chosen from among hundreds of applications. Homesteaders had to be American citizens, or in the process of being naturalized. By limiting the project to Americans, Peckham hoped to "squash any Red Scare stuff," referring to complaints that the project was too socialistic.[7] Five black families were included, although one dropped out.

The Friends strongly believed that the success of the community depended upon the selection of suitable individuals--that is, families who shared the AFSC's commitment to the project, and who could demonstrate a willingness to work toward a common goal. Special consideration was also given to the age of each family member, financial resources, and productive capacity.[8] As a result, the application procedure was considerably more intensive than that of the federal government.

Errol Peckham interviewed most of the applicants for the AFSC. Living in one side of a semi-detached company house in Republic, Peckham and his wife became acquainted with a number of families in the area. At the behest of the Friends, Peckham had also established a small-scale subsistence garden program among the miners' families. By visiting and interviewing the families several times, and following up on their references, Peckham was able to ascertain the extent of each family's general character and interest in the project. Final acceptance depended upon a small test: the applicant had to work at the project on a trial basis. The Friends wanted to be sure that everyone was aware of the personal commitment and sacrifice needed, and indeed, despite the cash earned, a number of men immediately withdrew when confronted by the amount of physical labor involved. One man, after putting in six hours, threw down his shovel, saying, "I'm going home. I work on the WPA [Works Progress Administration] and we never work more than six hours a day."[9]

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[6] American Friends Service Committee, "Conference Concerning the Fayette County Project," 14 September 1936, AFSC Archives.

[7] Memorandum from Errol Peckham, Republic, to Homer Morris, Philadelphia, 8 January 1937, AFSC Archives.

[8] "Self-Help Cooperative Housing," Monthly Labor Review 49 (September 1939): 567.

[9] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary.

Work on the community progressed steadily through the application period, which extended well into 1938. Streets were laid out and surveyed, lots were plotted, land cleared, and a water system arranged. Each of the fifty homesteads would have one house and several outbuildings. The appearance of these structures, however, differed greatly from the original concept.

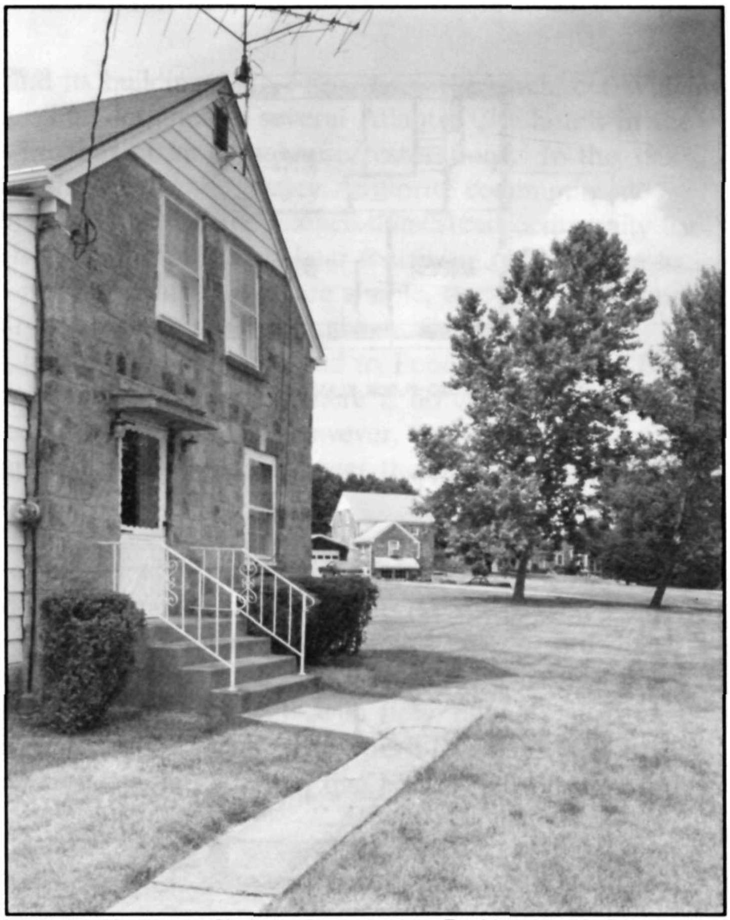

Figure 4 Houses on Circle 4. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

DESIGN

The first house plan for Penn-Craft came from David Day in a budget estimate dated December 20, 1936. Based on his experience as director of the Westmoreland Homesteads project, Day proposed the construction of one-story, frame dwellings measuring 20' x 38' on a concrete foundation. The houses were to have "a combined kitchen and dining room unit, a 15' x 20' living room, three bedrooms, a large pantry, a shower room, and running water," indicating that they lacked indoor toilets. The total estimated cost for such a house was a conservative $1,100, which fit neatly below the $2,000 ceiling placed on individual house loans by the AFSC.[10] While the Friends advocated economical dwellings, they also wanted to stress comfort and permanency. This led to the rejection of Day's initial proposal in favor of a small, stone house with a full indoor bathroom, garage, and cellar.

Like many of the Division of Subsistence Homesteads communities, Penn-Craft was laid out in an irregular plan to take advantage of the rolling hills of western Pennsylvania. The community was designed around several existing buildings, including the original nineteenth-century Craft farmhouse and barn. As at Norvelt, the community was surrounded by the cooperatively run farm--here occupying about 110 acres. The fifty homesteads, averaging about two acres each, were laid out along four cul-de-sacs, called sections, extending from both sides of an existing township road. The circles at the end of each cul-de-sac caused the houses to be placed at angles to each other. Five different house designs, featuring front-gable and side-gable roofs, added further variety to the landscape. This contrasted dramatically to the homesteaders' former communities, where straight rows of identical miners' houses marched

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[10] David Day to Homer Morris, 10 December 1936, AFSC Archives.

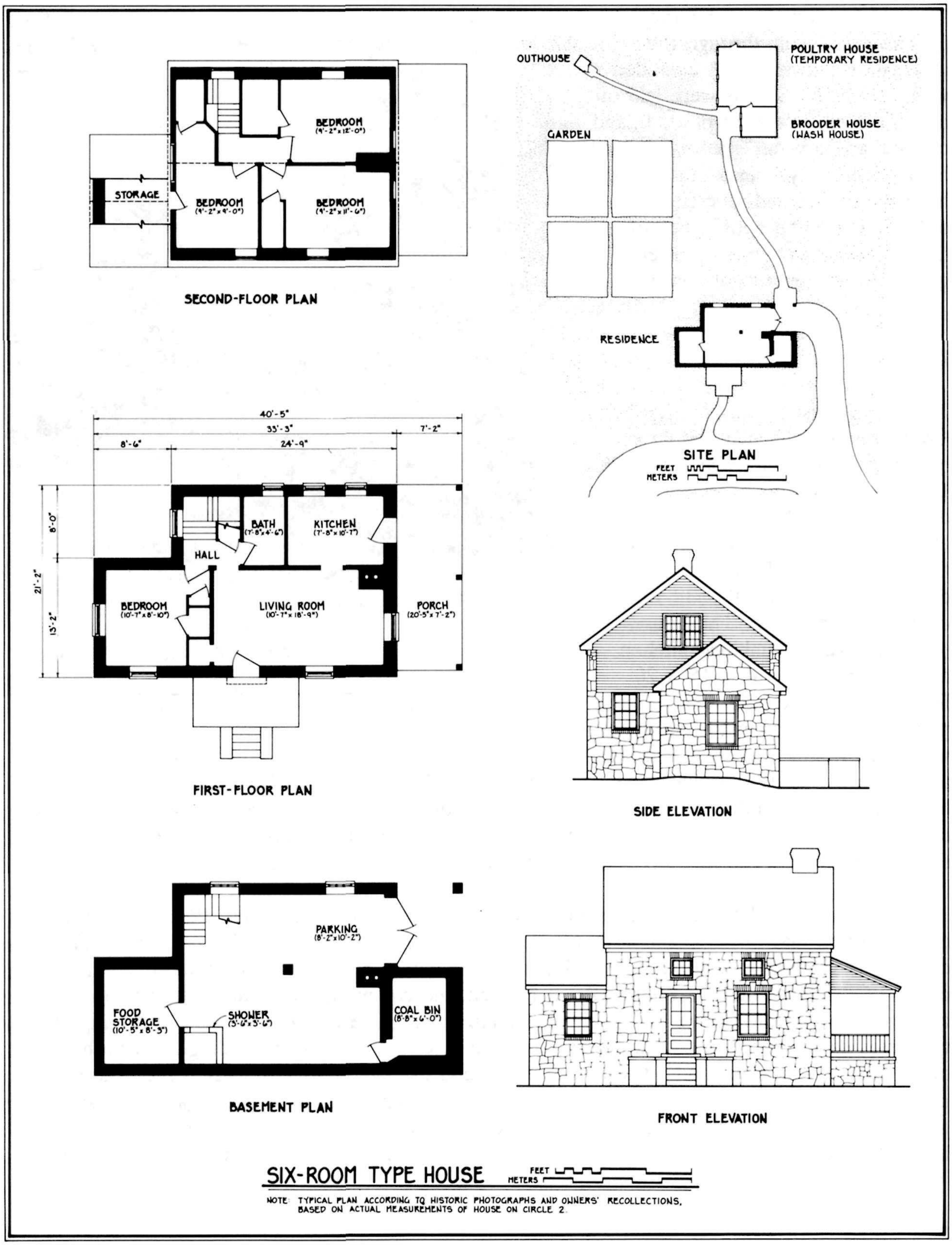
OUTHOUSE
POULTRY HOUSE
(TEMPORARY RESIDENCE)
BROODER HOUSE
(WASH HOUSE)
GARDEN
RESIDENCE
SITE PLAN
FEET
METERS
STORAGE
BEDROOM
(9'-2" x 12'-0")
BEDROOM
(9'-2" x 9'-0")
BEDROOM
(9'-2" x 11'-6")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
40'-5"
33'-3"
7'-2"
8'-6"
24'-9"
8'-0"
21'-2"
13'-2"
BATH
(7'-8" x 4'-6")
KITCHEN
(7'-8" x 10'-7")
HALL
BEDROOM
(10'-7" x 8'-10")
LIVING ROOM
(10'-7" x 18'-9")
PORCH
(20'-5" x 7'-2")
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
SIDE ELEVATION
PARKING
(8'-2" x 10'-2")
FOOD STORAGE
(10'-5" x 8'-3")
SHOWER
(3'-6" x 3'-6")
COAL BIN
(8'-8" x 6'-0")
BASEMENT PLAN
FRONT ELEVATION
SIX-ROOM TYPE HOUSE
FEET
METERS
NOTE: TYPICAL PLAN ACCORDING TO HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS AND OWNERS' RECOLLECTIONS, BASED ON ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS OF HOUSE ON CIRCLE 2.

Figure 5 Plans, elevations, and site plan of six-room, L-plan house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

uniformly along the street.

For the design of the community and its buildings, the Friends selected architect William Macy Stanton, a Friend from Philadelphia. The designer of several Atlantic City hotels in the 1920s, Stanton was also the architect of a number of meeting-house restorations. In the 1930s, the federal government hired him to design the Tennessee Valley Authority community at Norris, Tennessee, as well as Cumberland Homesteads, a subsistence-homestead community for stranded miners, also in Tennessee. The houses at Penn-Craft bear a striking resemblance to those at Cumberland Homesteads; houses in both communities are simple, one-and-a-half-story structures built of local stone. A much larger community (262 families), Cumberland Homesteads incorporated fifteen different house plans as compared to Penn-Craft's five. But while Cumberland homesteaders helped build their own homes, there is no evidence that their input was sought in the actual design process. At Penn-Craft, however, "each family selected a house plan [and] minor changes were permitted in each plan to meet the particular needs of each family."[11]

Although the Friends wanted homesteaders to participate in the design process, they were unsure about how much deviation was economically feasible. The AFSC allowed each family to pick its own lot and house plan, and worked with the homesteaders to assure that a pleasing alteration of the different plans resulted in each section. Bona and Raymond Billiani selected a lot next door to the Fiors, friends from the same village in Italy, but to live there meant they could not have the design they wanted. Although there were five different designs for four-, five- and six-room dwellings, the Friends admitted that "five house plans, even with some changes, would fail to meet the needs of fifty different families."[12] While the AFSC acknowledged that individually planned houses would be the ideal, the amount of time and money involved prohibited that option. In another memorandum to Homer Morris, Day explained the dilemma, saying:

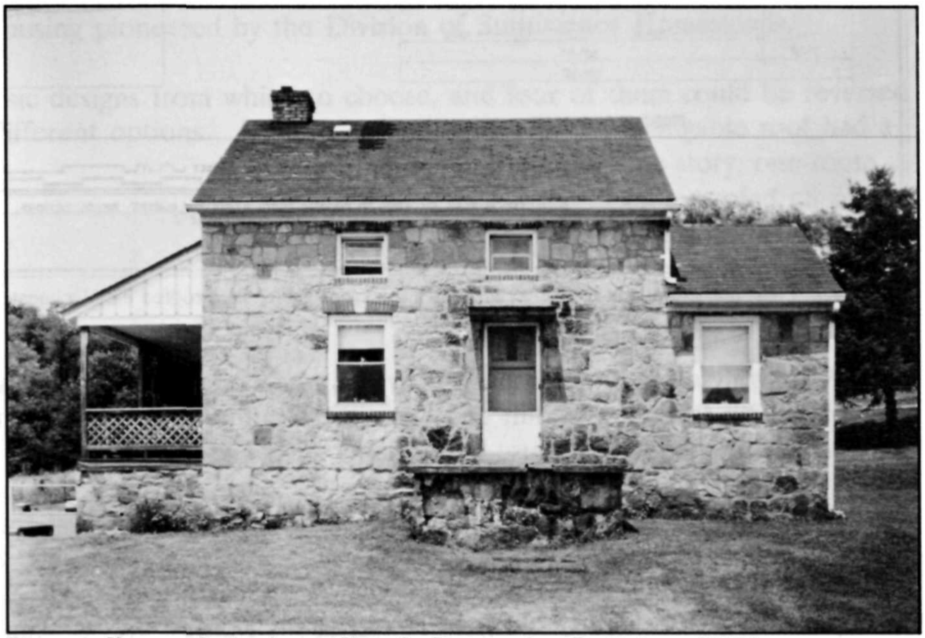

Figure 6 Six-room, L-plan house, Circle 3. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

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[11] Elizabeth Straw, "National Register Nomination: Cumberland Homesteads Historic District," (National Park Service, 1988); Orslene and Shearer; AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 5.

[12] AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 5.

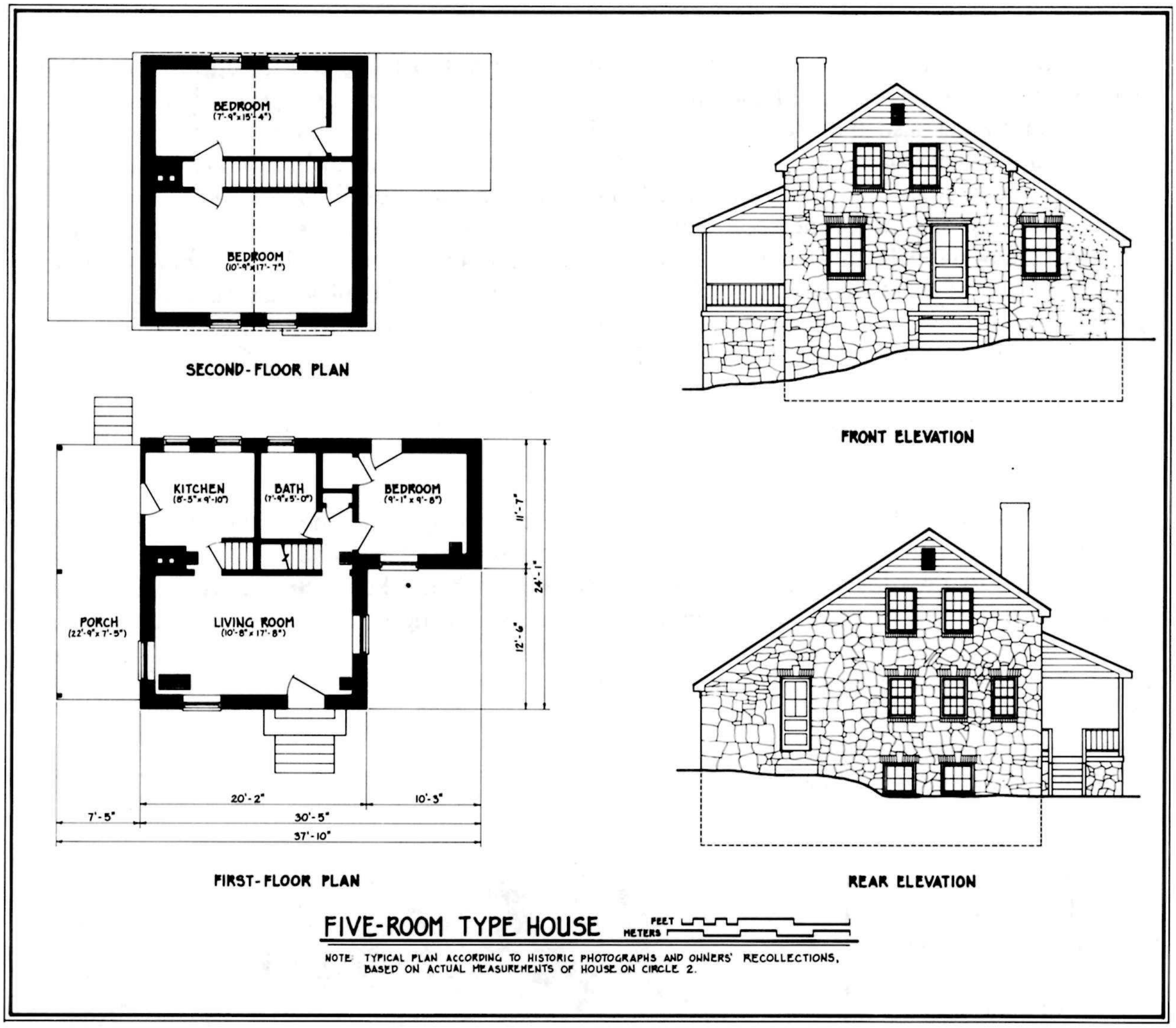
BEDROOM
(7'-9"x15'-4")
BEDROOM
(10'-9"x17'-7")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
KITCHEN
(8'-5"x9'-10")
BATH
(7'-9"x5'-0")
BEDROOM
(9'-1"x9'-8")
PORCH
(22'-9"x7'-5")
LIVING ROOM
(10'-8"x17'-8")
11'-7"
24'-1"
12'-6"
20'-2"
10'-3"
7'-5"
30'-5"
37'-10"
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
FRONT ELEVATION
REAR ELEVATION
FIVE-ROOM TYPE HOUSE
FEET
METERS
NOTE: TYPICAL PLAN ACCORDING TO HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS AND OWNERS' RECOLLECTIONS, BASED ON ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS OF HOUSE ON CIRCLE 2.

Figure 7 Plans and elevations of five-room house with front gable, shed-roofed ell. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

> I find myself very much baffled by this question of house design. I feel very sensitive to the viewpoint and desire of a homesteader who is anxious to have some say about the house he is planning to live in during the coming years. On the other hand, I recognize the impossible situation we get in unless we can have an architect right here on the job to work out the best thing in counsel with the families.[13]

Finally, the AFSC decided that exterior dimensions would have to remain fixed, but minor changes to the interior floor plan would be permitted. Project architect Macy Stanton had to make several extended trips to Fayette County in order to work in the homesteaders' minor alterations.

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[13] David Day to Homer Morris, 13 July 1937, AFSC Archives.

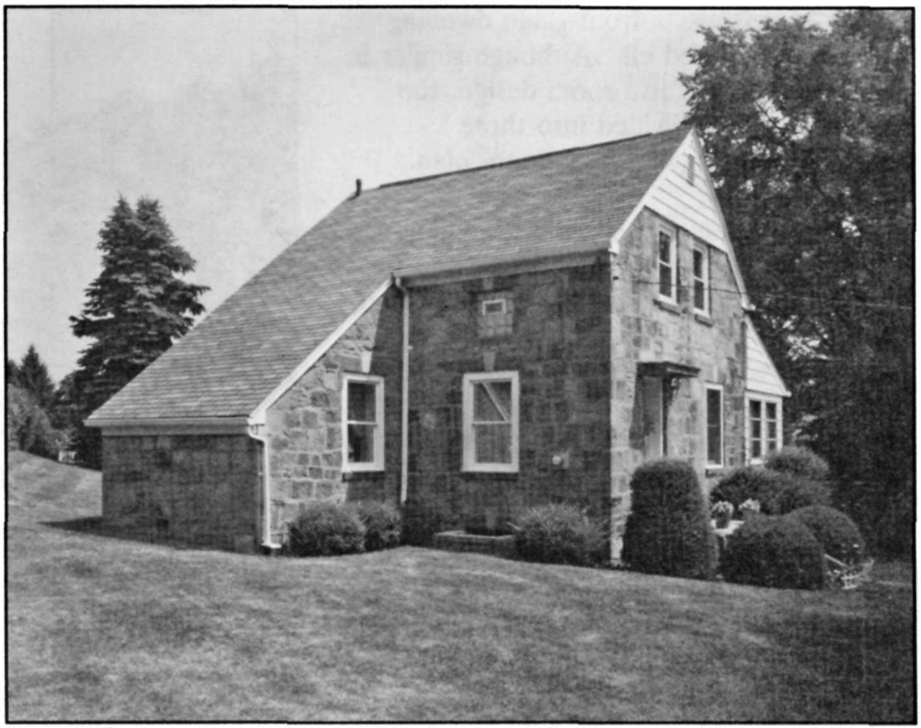

Figure 8 Five-room house with front gable, shed-roofed ell, Circle 4. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

All the houses in Penn-Craft were one-and-a-half-story stone structures with simple wood cornices and trim. Windows were usually defined by brick sills and lintels with keystones, while the front doors were framed by stone stoops and small concrete overhangs. These modern overhangs departed from the generally conservative style of the buildings. The use of native stone and gable roofs, reminiscent of Pennsylvania farmhouses, and the small size were in the tradition of the low-cost housing pioneered by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads.

There were five basic designs from which to choose, and four of them could be reversed in plan, to produce nine different options. A six-room house with a low, side-gable roof had a one-story, one-room, gable-roofed ell on one side of the main block, and a shed-roofed, frame porch extending from the other. The ell was usually aligned with the main facade.

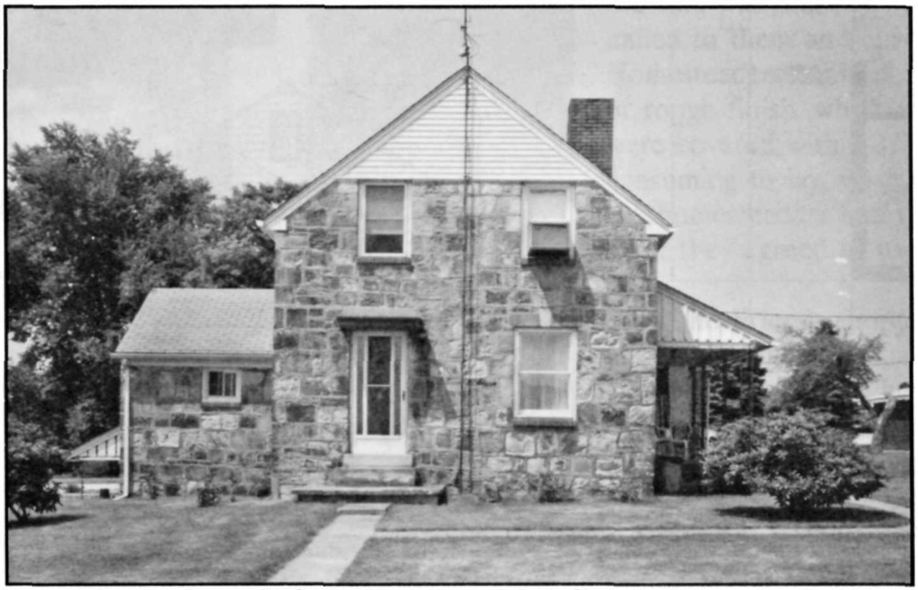

Figure 9 Six-room house with front gable, gable-roofed ell, Circle 4. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

In the five-room design, the main block had a front-gable roof, with a one-story ell to one side and a porch to the other. The ell had a shed roof and was usually set back from the facade. A variant of this was a front-gable dwelling with a gable-roofed ell. Although similar in appearance to the five-room design, the second floor was divided into three bedrooms, making this a six-room plan.

A symmetrical six-room dwelling was side-gabled with a center entrance and two dormers. The first floor had a living room, kitchen, bedroom, and a dining room--a rarity in these subsistence homestead projects. A porch extended from one side. Only three of these were built; the other forty-seven houses were fairly evenly spread

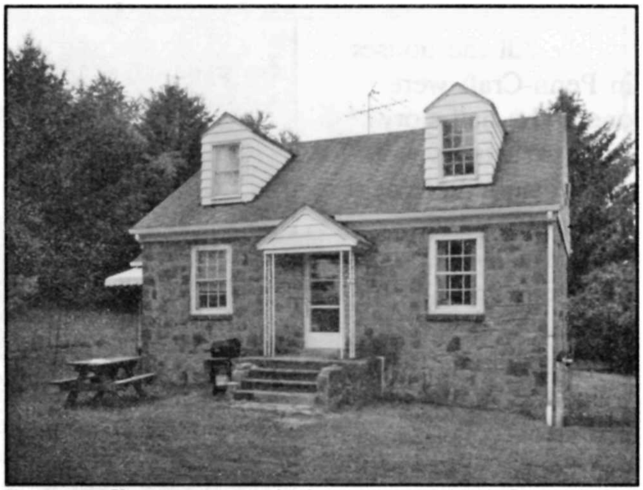

Figure 10 Six-room rectangular house, on state road. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

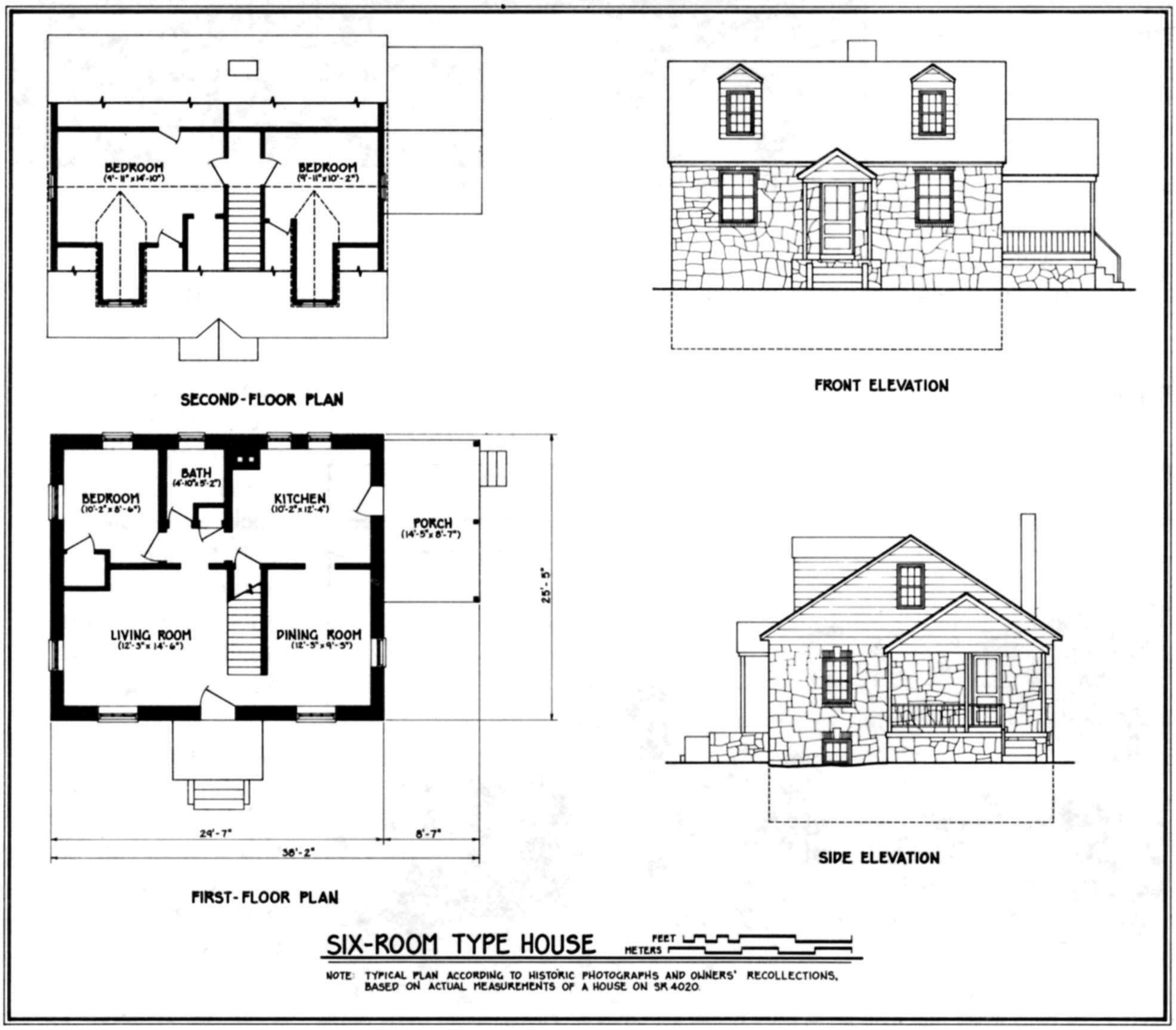
BEDROOM
(9'-11" x 14'-10")
BEDROOM
(9'-11" x 10'-2")
SECOND-FLOOR PLAN
BEDROOM
(10'-2" x 8'-6")
BATH
(4'-10" x 5'-2")
KITCHEN
(10'-2" x 12'-4")
PORCH
(14'-5" x 8'-7")
LIVING ROOM
(12'-3" x 14'-6")
DINING ROOM
(12'-5" x 9'-5")
25'-5"
29'-7"
8'-7"
38'-2"
FIRST-FLOOR PLAN
FRONT ELEVATION
SIDE ELEVATION
SIX-ROOM TYPE HOUSE
FEET
METERS
NOTE: TYPICAL PLAN ACCORDING TO HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS AND OWNERS' RECOLLECTIONS,
BASED ON ACTUAL MEASUREMENTS OF A HOUSE ON SR 4020

Figure 11 Plans and elevations of six-room, rectangular house. Delineator: Isabel C. Yang, HABS.

among the other five- and six-room designs. Although four-room houses were mentioned in correspondence and reports, none survives. All the houses at Penn-Craft have at least two bedrooms on the second floor, and a kitchen, living room, and at least one other room on the first. It is possible that the four-room houses resembled the five-room front-gable ones (without the ell), and that ells were added soon after construction to provide a fifth room.

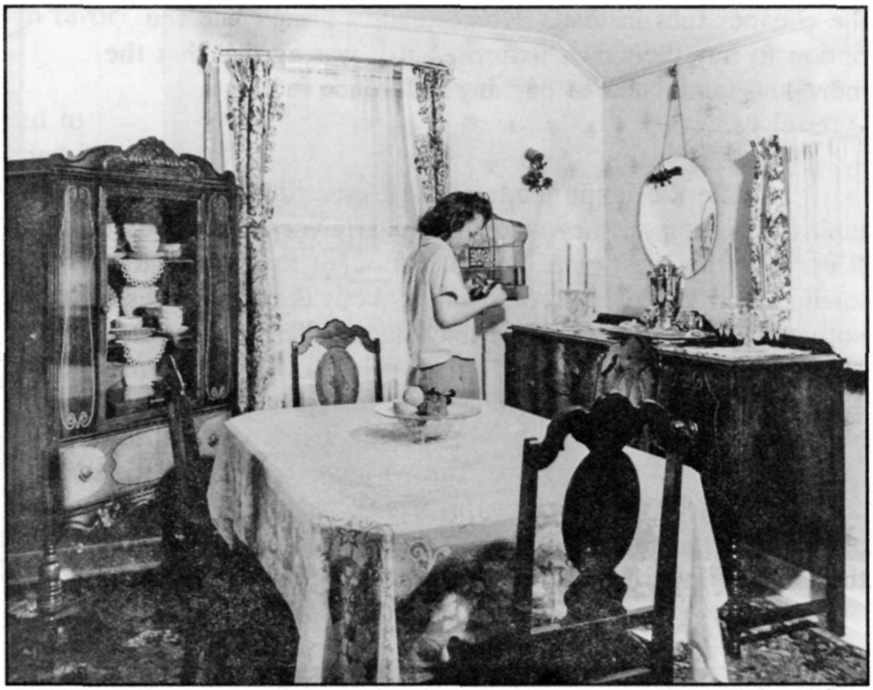

Figure 12 Dining rooms were planned in only three houses. Photographer unknown (1942), AFSC.

Each house had a full cellar with a coal-fired central heating unit, laundry facilities, and food-storage space. If the contour of the site permitted, part of the basement was devoted to the garage.[14] The interior finish of Penn-Craft houses was lath and plaster. During construction, narrow strips of wood were laid between the layers of stone and concrete. When the wall was finished, vertical strips of lath were nailed to them and covered with plaster. Homesteaders could choose between a smooth or rough finish, which was then painted. Floors were covered with 1-1/2" boards that, while time-consuming to lay, were very inexpensive. Since the homesteaders had little cash but a lot of time, they agreed to use the narrow boards.

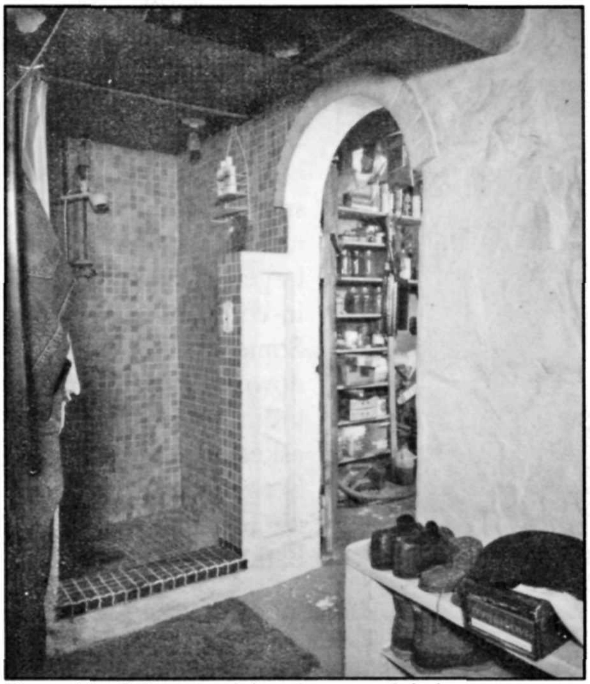

Figure 13 Cellar containing shower and fruit-storage room, Circle 2. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

The Friends shopped around to find the least expensive stoves, refrigerators, sinks, toilets, and bathtubs for the houses. The cheapest bathtubs, for example, were the kind with legs, although plans called for a built-in variety. The homesteaders merely removed the legs and used the cheaper tubs instead. Homesteaders always had the option to buy their own fixtures, but it was agreed that the individual family had to pay any difference in price themselves.[15]

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[14] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Housing with Self-Help Features," Nonprofit Housing Projects - United States, Bulletin 896 (1948), 41.

While the homesteaders had a great deal to say about their future homes, they were particularly vocal about room sizes. For the most part, everyone thought the houses too small. Even David Day complained about the room sizes, noting that they were smaller than the smallest houses at Westmoreland Homesteads.[16] Homesteader Walter Seeman, he reported, "seems dissatisfied with the plan of Type A house, designed for Lot 12. He feels that it is too restricted in room size and would rather forego immediate installation of all conveniences than restrict the size of rooms."[17] Seeman preferred bigger rooms to an indoor bathroom. As at Norvelt, the issue of indoor bathrooms was hotly debated. To avoid additional cost, the Friends restricted placement of the bathroom to the first floor, yet this meant having a small kitchen and combined living-dining room. Homesteaders were unhappy about having small kitchens, since most were used to the larger kitchens found in company houses. Some used the downstairs bedroom as a dining room. When asked to choose between a bigger kitchen and a bathroom, though,

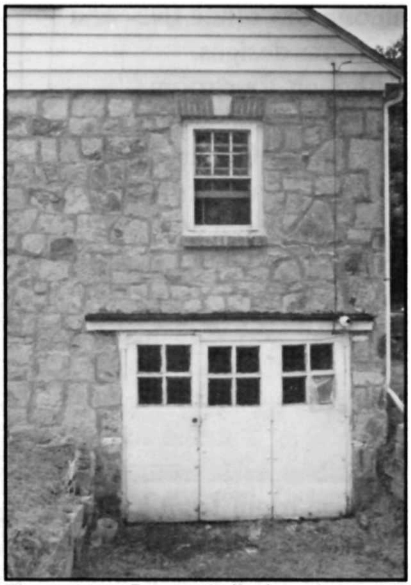

Figure 14 Garage built into basement. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

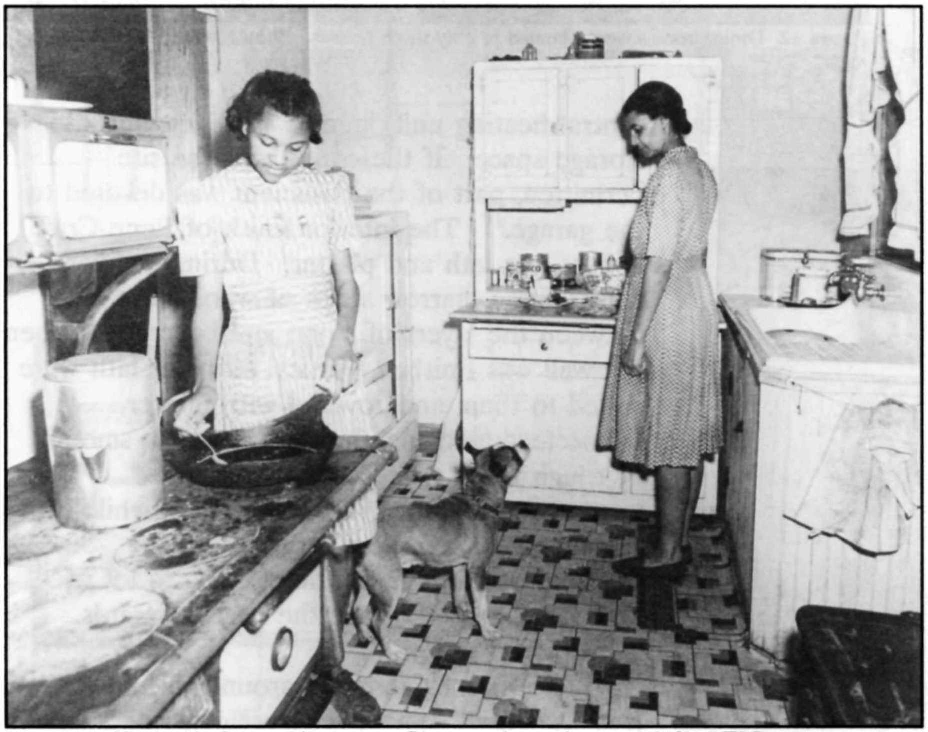

Figure 15 Kitchen in Satterwhite house. Photographer unknown (1942), AFSC.

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[15] J. C. Carp, Jr., and Joe Shaw., interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 21 June 1989.

[16] According to the original plans of the Norvelt houses and measurements of the Penn-Craft houses, the Type 401 house at Norvelt had a 150-sq. ft. kitchen and 187-sq. ft. living room, compared to the 81-sq. ft. kitchen and 198-sq. ft. living room at Penn-Craft.

[17] Day to Morris, 13 July 1937.

"they have decided invariably in favor of the bathroom."[18]

Little space was devoted to hallways. The front door opened into the living room, and the rear door into the kitchen. To avoid the problem of miners tracking dirt through the house on their way to the bathroom, some homesteaders installed a shower in the basement, reached through the garage. John Carp had a different solution. According to his son, Carp insisted that a small hallway be built, although this reduced the size of the bathroom itself.[19]

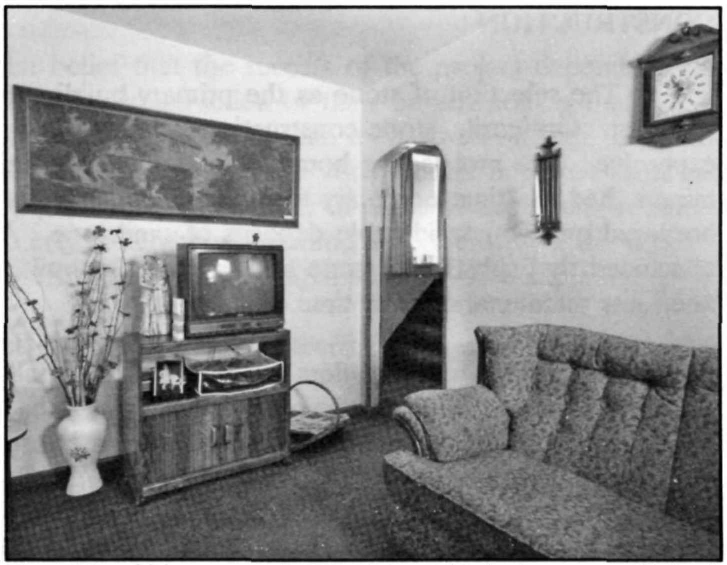

Figure 16 Living room, looking into stairhall, house on Circle 2. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

The size of Penn-Craft houses often forced many homesteader families to make adjustments in their lifestyle. Although large families were accustomed to sharing beds and rooms, the situation was exacerbated at Penn-Craft, where rooms were considerably smaller. Joe Shaw recalled that his six sisters had to share the one bed that fit in their room, sleeping crossways to fit. Shaw himself shared a bed with two brothers. John Carp also erected a partition in one upstairs room for his children. Because of the wall, J. C. Carp, Jr., had to walk through his teen-aged sisters' bedroom to get to his own. Moreover, several persons interviewed remarked that it was difficult to move furniture into the houses, because of dog-leg stairways and low, angled ceilings. But most people suffered the transition gladly.

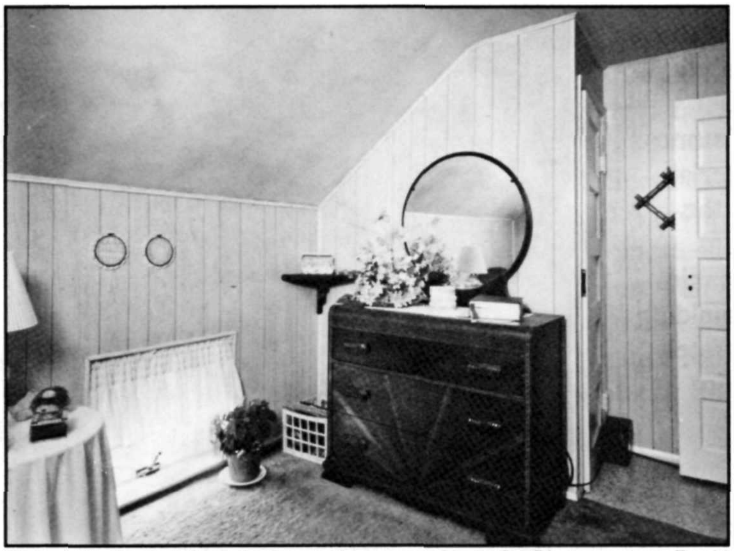

Figure 17 Second-floor bedroom, house on Circle 2. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

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[18] AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 5; Muriel Sheppard, Cloud by Day (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 226.

[19] Sheppard, 226; J. C. Carp, Jr.

CONSTRUCTION

The selection of stone as the primary building material was based on both availability and cost. Ordinarily, stone construction is more labor-intensive than frame, and hence, more expensive. The prospective homesteaders, however, being unemployed or partially employed miners, had the time necessary to quarry their own stone. In addition, the Craft property bordered on two considerable deposits of sandstone. After careful investigation, the field staff concluded that substantial stone houses could be built as cheaply as frame dwellings, and would need less maintenance over time.

Houses for homesteaders necessarily had to fall within a realistic price range. From their initial investigation of the county, the Friends had calculated $10 as the maximum amount miners could afford to pay each month toward a house. At the 2 percent rate of interest and twenty-year amortization period planned by the AFSC, a loan of $2,000 was decided as the maximum amount available to any homesteader. Taxes and insurance increased the monthly payment by about $3. The AFSC's budget was $180,000. Of this, $100,000 was dedicated to the revolving fund, to be lent to the fifty families, $2,000 each. The remainder was used for staff salaries and construction equipment, so that the project was subsidized by more than one-third. In addition, the mortgage was below market rate. The $2,000 cost of the house, land, and infrastructure did not include the 2,500 hours of labor that each homesteader put in on his and his neighbor's houses.[20]

David Day, as project manager, was responsible for the acquisition of supplies. Through his efforts, the project acquired equipment that enabled the homesteaders to drill, cut, blast, and dress the stone themselves. Day also found a small, used stone crusher, which enabled the men to grind broken stone into sand for concrete. The cost of materials was further reduced by the proximity of the project to hundreds of beehive coke ovens that were being dismantled by coal companies for tax purposes, and could be used as building material. Each coke oven was sold separately, and yielded reusable dressed stone and fire brick. Residents of the community also remember raiding abandoned houses for building materials. Wood for door and window frames, joists, and rafters were cut in nearby mills from trees felled by the homesteaders on the property.[21]

Figure 18 Grace L. Sinosky and son, in bathroom. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

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[20] AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 4, 9.

[21] Joe Shaw, Estel Debord, and J. C. Carp, Jr.

The Friends were adamant in their belief that the success of the project depended upon the participation of homesteader families in the construction of their homes, stating that "the construction of the houses by the men themselves was more than a construction job. It was the core of the educational program." On the practical side, house construction imparted skills such as carpentry, wiring, and plumbing that might help sustain them in times of economic trouble. More important, however, it would "help create neighborliness and a cooperative spirit which will send the social roots deep and give permanence and strength to the whole experiment."[22]

In the initial stages of the project, work consisted of clearing land, plowing the cooperative farm, and preparing materials; later, crews were sent out to excavate basements, lay up walls, mix concrete and so on. The crews were composed of men and boys who worked on a system of credit hours much like that of the federal projects. Boys, age 16 to 19, earned "boy hours," or three-quarters of a man hour. At the end of the day, each man and boy reported the number of hours he had worked, and on what job. Thus, a man who put in eight hours of labor on a neighbor's house had eight hours of labor owed on his own dwelling. The basic house required about 2,750 hours, not counting hours for finishing work that was left to the occupant.[23] Ten hours was the recommended amount a homesteader should put in each day, although this was adjusted to suit the individual's schedule.[24] When construction on a homesteader's house ended, so did his participation in the credit-for-labor system.

In addition to men and boys, a third group of laborers was known as "campers." The campers were a group of fifty young college students, mostly Friends themselves, who volunteered in the summer to aid the project. The young men participated in house construction, more than doubling the number of work crews, while the young women conducted informal classes for the homesteader children; a few of the female campers, "conspicuous in their shorts," according to investigator Frederick L. W. Richardson, pitched in with the farmwork. The campers also contributed to the social life of the community by organizing dances and games, and to the economic life by patronizing the cooperative store.[25]

Construction on the houses began in Section 1, and was to progress through the community, section by section, and lot by lot. Very quickly it became apparent that this method was unsatisfactory, for unemployed homesteaders would end up building houses for the employed homesteaders. Some of the men were still working part time in the mines and could not devote as many days a week to the project as others. Then, too, some men were simply more conscientious than others about putting in a full day's work.[26] Furthermore, some of the men were paid their labor debt in the form of boy hours contributed by their sons. Most of the community objected to this practice for two reasons: first, the purpose of house construction was to teach new skills to the homesteaders themselves, not just their children; and second, the labor of boys lacked workmanship and productivity compared to adults. Last, there was a tendency to perform less work on a neighbor's house than on one's own. To encourage equal participation, the Work Committee--which included Day and five elected homesteaders--decided that houses would be built according to how many hours a man had to his credit instead of by lot number.[27] When it came time to start excavating basements, Pete Stermock's house was first since he had the most hours.

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[22] AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 6; AFSC, "Turning Liabilities into Assets," AFSC Archives.

[23] Sheppard, 224.

[24] Day, "Memorandum to Homesteaders."

[25] Frederick L. Richardson, Jr., "Community Resettlement in a Depressed Coal Region," Applied Anthropology (October-December 1941): 41.

[26] AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 7.

Temporary Housing

There was also the problem of distance. Few of the miners had their own cars, and so found it difficult to make the journey to and from the Craft farm every day. The solution, provided by the homesteaders themselves, was to erect temporary dwellings on the site in the form of poultry houses. Poultry houses were part of the original plan, and by building them

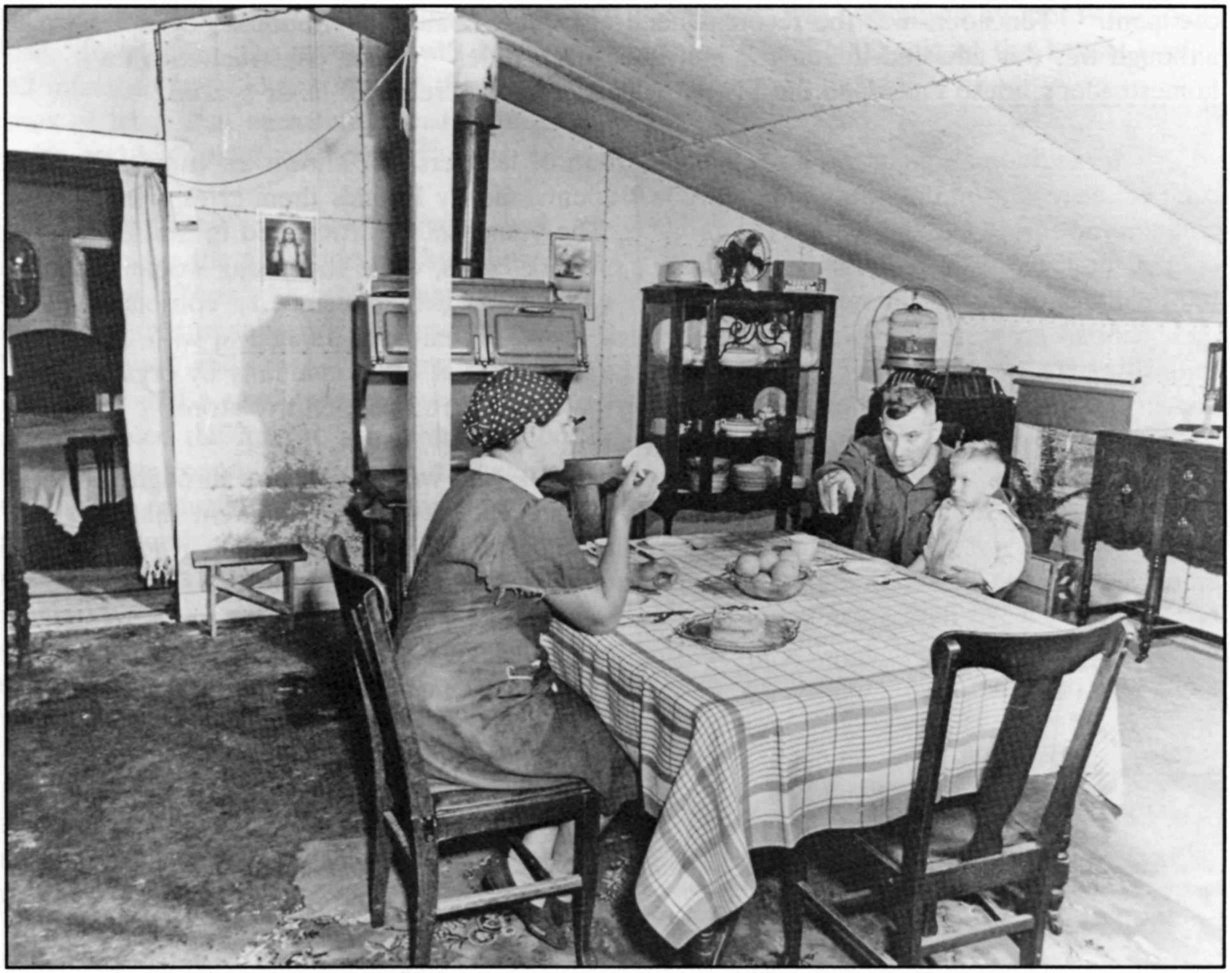

Figure 19 Interior of temporary house. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

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[27] "Self-Help Cooperative Housing," 573; Sheppard, 224.

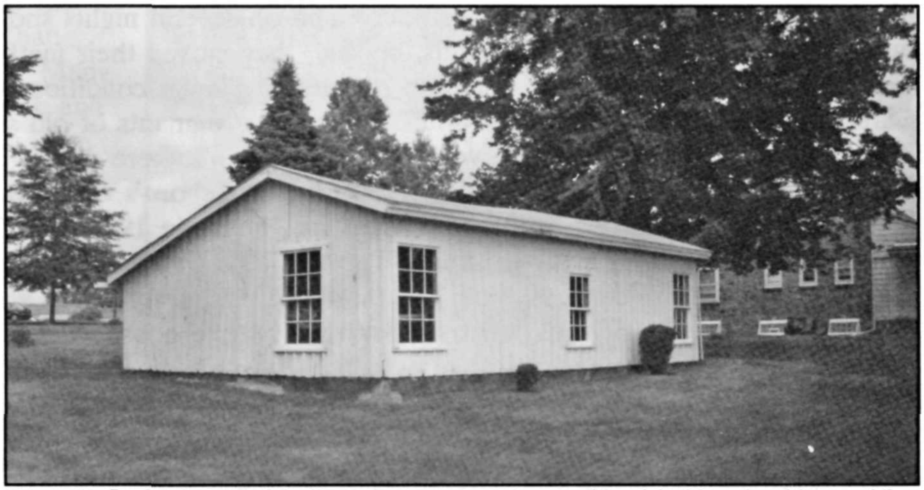

Figure 20 Poultry house, originally used as temporary house, with original board-and-batten siding, Circle 4. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

first, the family could live on site and apply the time usually spent in transit toward construction. David Day made some quick estimates, and found that with a little extra time and money, "a 20' x 40' poultry house of the Pennsylvania State College Type" could be built. The cost would be $350 per house for materials, which the AFSC would supply from the general project fund. The homesteaders, under supervision of a professional carpenter, would supply the labor. Furthermore, until the stone houses were completed, the homesteaders would contribute $10 per month as rent on the temporary houses, to be deducted from the initial loan. Pleased at the initiative shown by the homesteaders in solving this dilemma, the AFSC in Philadelphia approved the plan wholeheartedly.[28]

Like the stone houses, the temporary houses were small. As built, the temporary houses measured 20' x 20' and had one big all-purpose room with a coal stove in it, plus a small unheated bedroom. They were described as "cozy living quarters for small families without too much furniture, but life in them was somewhat difficult at times for the larger families."[29] Mrs. Joseph Shaw, Sr., could not fit all of the furniture she had brought from Brownsville, Pa., into her temporary house, and left the remainder outside.

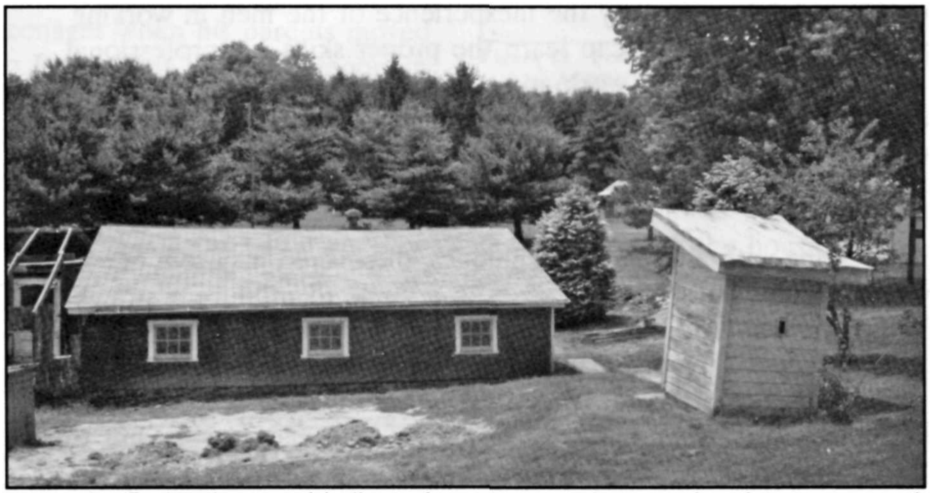

Figure 21 Poultry house, originally used as temporary house, and outhouse, state road. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

In some cases, a 10' x 12' brooder house was attached to one end of the structure for extra space. Joe Shaw recalled that he and his two brothers slept in the brooder house, and on several nights snow blew through the cracks onto their beds. On really cold nights, he said, they moved their mattresses inside and huddled with their parents and six sisters around the stove. Similar conditions were reported by J. C. Carp. In fact, the Carps' brooder house still retains remnants of old stockings and rags stuffed into the cracks. The uninsulated walls, made of 2" x 4"s, were clad with board-and-batten siding outside and tongue-and-groove boards inside. Estel Debord's wife, Mary, who moved from a large company house at Isabella into a temporary house in 1945, was dismayed when she saw what was to be her first married home. The house had a concrete floor, a door that would not close properly, and spiders. She did not think the temporary house was as nice as her childhood home in Isabella, but her father-in-law's stone house at Penn-Craft was "like a mansion," and its indoor bathroom, "a novelty, a step up."[30] The Debords lived in the temporary house until 1952, when homesteader Charles Debord died, and left the stone house to his son, Estel.

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[28] David Day to Homer Morris, 17 May 1937, AFSC Archives.

[29] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary.

In 1938 the AFSC contracted with the Harvard Business School to conduct an investigation of the project to date, emphasizing the methods used to rehabilitate the miners. For more than a year, Frederick L. W. Richardson, Jr., lived in Penn-Craft and participated in its development. Richardson concluded that crowded conditions in the temporary houses put pressure on some homesteaders, especially those with large families, to finish their stone houses quickly. To illustrate his point, Richardson described a typical evening scene wherein the youngest children would be sleeping, the middle children playing, an elder daughter entertaining her beau in the corner, and the parents trying to preside over all. One young woman lamented, "Here there is no privacy. The small houses are getting on our nerves."[31] And the homesteaders' discomfort merely grew as construction of the stone houses dragged on.

Stone Construction

At first, both the Friends and the homesteaders were satisfied with the choice of stone, but problems arose almost immediately, particularly the inexperience of the men in working with the material, and the amount of time it took to learn the proper skills. A professional mason, Max Gonano, was hired to oversee their work and to teach the men the finer points of stone construction, yet the traditional method of hand-laying stone walls proved excessively slow.[32] Another method of construction had to be found if the houses were to be built in a timely fashion.

The field staff, experimenting with alternative techniques, discovered a system of movable wood forms to erect the stone walls. Serving as both a guide to produce a straight wall and as a retainer for the stone and mortar, the forms were used to produce walls 16" thick in the cellar and 14" thick above ground. In this manner, the walls could be built much faster and with less supervision. According to Carp, who helped his father build their stone house, the exteriors were originally supposed to be whitewashed to imitate local farmhouses, but when completed, everyone agreed that the houses looked "better than they thought they would."[33] Many homesteaders even went back and pointed the mortar, producing an exterior finish identical to that of hand-laid stone walls. Architect William Macy Stanton was pleased with the results, stating when he visited the site in October 1938 that, despite a lack of craftsmanship, the houses were better built than if the stonework had been let to a private contractor.[34]

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[30] Joe Shaw; J. C. Carp, Jr.; Mary Debord, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney at Penn-Craft, 21 June 1989.

[31] Richardson, 36.

[32] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary.

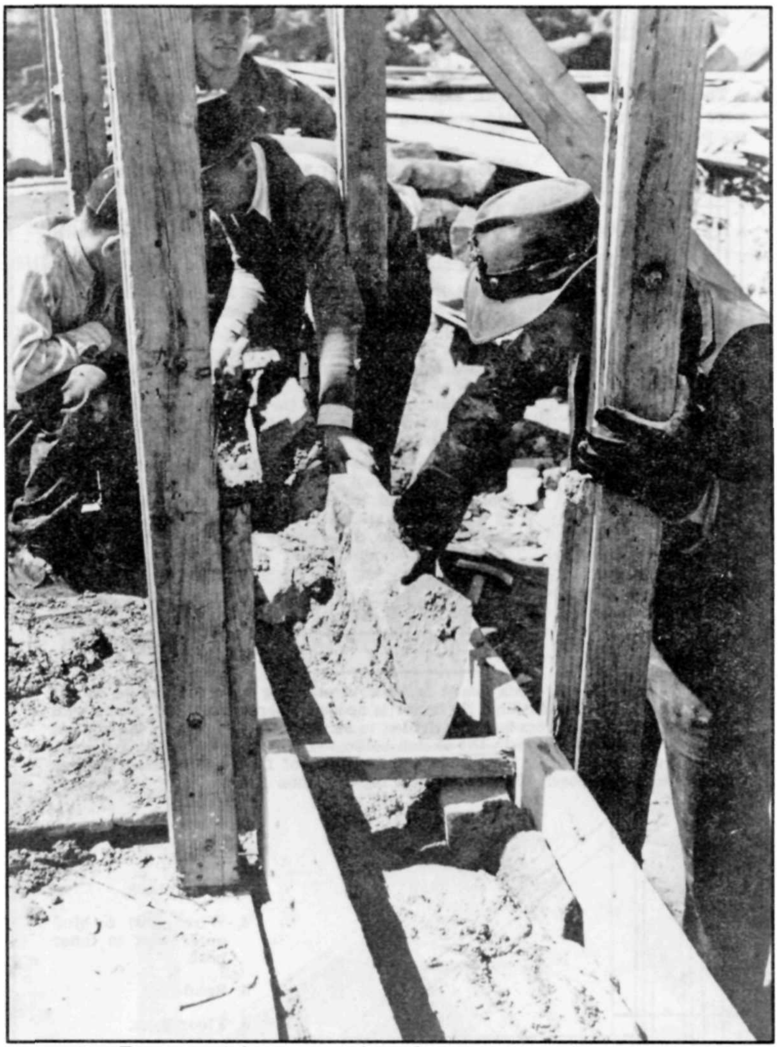

Figure 22 Forms used for construction of stone walls. Photographer unknown (1942), AFSC.

The lack of professional craftsmanship that Stanton noticed is not readily apparent to the casual visitor, but if one looks closely at certain houses, mistakes here and there are visible--especially if the owner points them out. Estel Debord's house is an excellent example. Located along one of the original roads leading into the community, the house belonged to his parents and has been little altered. Debord, a teenager when his parents moved to Penn-Craft from Bridgeport in 1938, took an active part in the construction of the community, and fondly recalled working on his own home. Gesturing toward a certain window, he called attention to the flat arch above it, noting that the bricks were slightly skewed and the joints uneven. "You can't find another window like that in the house," he said, "I learned how it's done on that one." Debord also indicated certain greenish stones in the walls, partially eroded from the weather. Then he went on to recount how he, his father, and the work crew were finishing the upper walls one day, when an old man passing by stopped to tell them, "Those green stones ain't no good for building." But the wall was almost done by then so "What could we do?" Debord shrugged, and pointed out the places where he has had to stabilize crumbling stonework with concrete over the years. Several times he explained, "We just learned as we went along," indicating that mistakes were considered a valuable part of the learning experience.[35] But perhaps more important, the mistakes made by the homesteaders as they struggled to build their own homes imparted a sense of individuality and character to the houses; thus, the involvement of the homesteader and his family in the construction process enabled each family to personalize an otherwise standardized plan.

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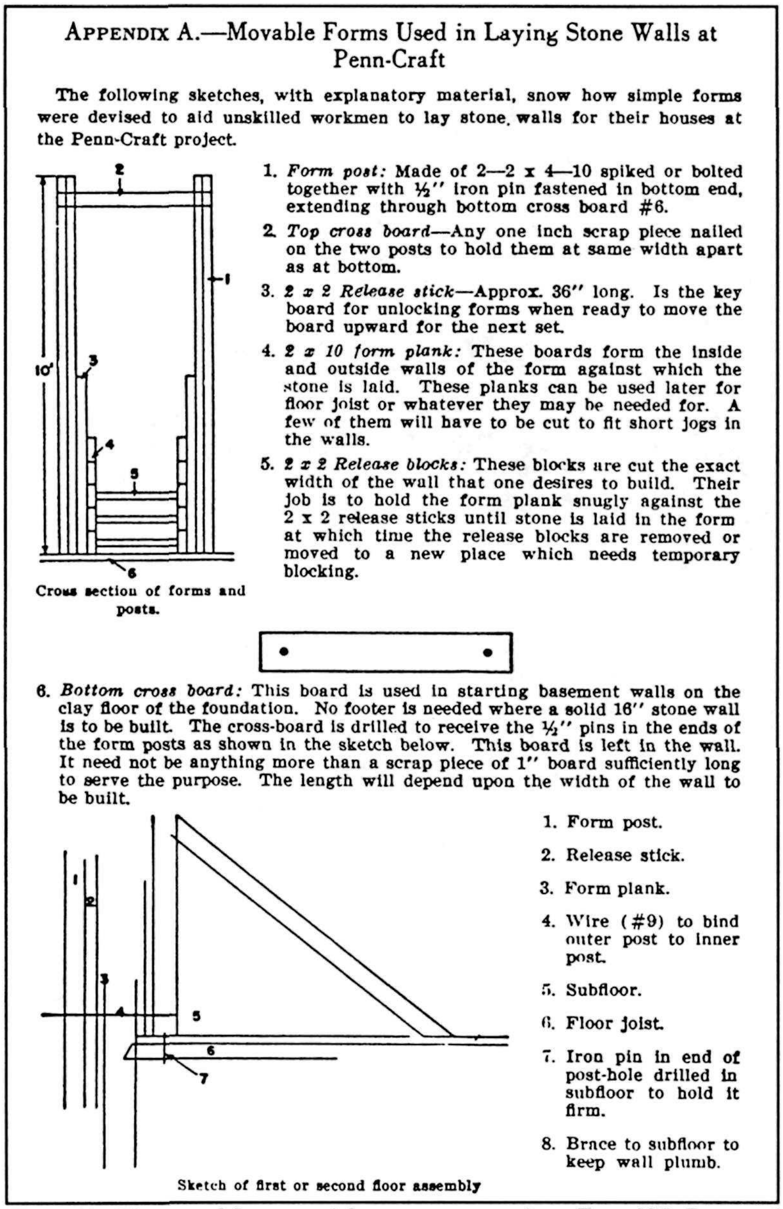
[33] J. C. Carp, Jr.

[34] Homer Morris, "Memorandum on Trip to Penn-Craft," 3 October 1938, AFSC Archives.



APPENDIX A.—Movable Forms Used in Laying Stone Walls at Penn-Craft

The following sketches, with explanatory material, snow how simple forms were devised to aid unskilled workmen to lay stone. walls for their houses at the Penn-Craft project.

1. *Form post:* Made of 2—2 x 4—10 spiked or bolted together with ½" iron pin fastened in bottom end, extending through bottom cross board #6.
2. *Top cross board*—Any one inch scrap piece nailed on the two posts to hold them at same width apart as at bottom.
3. *2 x 2 Release stick*—Approx. 36" long. Is the key board for unlocking forms when ready to move the board upward for the next set.
4. *2 x 10 form plank:* These boards form the inside and outside walls of the form against which the stone is laid. These planks can be used later for floor joist or whatever they may be needed for. A few of them will have to be cut to fit short jogs in the walls.
5. *2 x 2 Release blocks:* These blocks are cut the exact width of the wall that one desires to build. Their job is to hold the form plank snugly against the 2 x 2 release sticks until stone is laid in the form at which time the release blocks are removed or moved to a new place which needs temporary blocking.

Cross section of forms and posts.

6. *Bottom cross board:* This board is used in starting basement walls on the clay floor of the foundation. No footer is needed where a solid 16" stone wall is to be built. The cross-board is drilled to receive the ½" pins in the ends of the form posts as shown in the sketch below. This board is left in the wall. It need not be anything more than a scrap piece of 1" board sufficiently long to serve the purpose. The length will depend upon the width of the wall to be built.

1. Form post.
2. Release stick.
3. Form plank.
4. Wire (#9) to bind outer post to inner post.
5. Subfloor.
6. Floor joist.
7. Iron pin in end of post-hole drilled in subfloor to hold it firm.
8. Brace to subfloor to keep wall plumb.

Sketch of first or second floor assembly

Figure 23 Diagram of forms used for stone construction. From U.S. Bureau of Labor Bulletin 896 (1948), 49.

Of all the homes in the community, that of the Billiani family is perhaps the most distinctive. An experienced stonemason, Raymond Billiani came from a nearby patch called Lambert, where he was employed primarily to repair coke ovens. These skills translated easily to house construction, and Billiani joined Gonano, the professional mason, as a construction foreman. Although the homesteaders had already switched to the form system, Billiani proposed to construct his house in the traditional manner. It would take longer, and he would have to do much of the work himself, but the Friends permitted him to do so. Excavation of the cellar began in 1940 and by the end of 1941 most of the walls were finished. Hurrying to complete the upper walls and get a roof on the house before winter, Billiani deliberately omitted a small gable window in the rear of the house. He also left out the flat brick arch over each window, preferring the uninterrupted expanse of stone instead. Bona Billiani recalled watching her husband lay the stones while helping to mix the mortar, and modestly said that the distinctive rough-faced stone and gable-roofed vestibule with round-arched opening at the front door were her ideas. Some changes were also made to the interior although "you were supposed to do it like the blueprint." These changes included a partition that divided one of the upstairs bedrooms into two rooms for the Billianis' children. When Raymond Billiani died in 1942, Bona assumed responsibility for completing the family home, and either asked or paid neighbors to help, "a bit at a time." The house, distinguished by its exceptional stonework, was finally ready for occupancy in 1945.[36]

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[35] AFSC, "Evaluation of Experiences," 8; Estel Debord.

THE COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY

As a cooperative economy was a primary object, the AFSC made sure that no one would forget the purpose of the community by writing it into the individual lease agreements:

> WHEREAS, Management secured said land and subdivided it with the idea of developing it for the purpose of a cooperative community composed of individuals and families who will build and occupy homes on the said land under the terms hereinafter set forth and will cooperate with each other for the common good and exercise a control over the community and its various interests for the mutual benefit of all the members thereof; . . .[37]

The intentions of the AFSC were to insure the involvement of the homesteaders in the governance of their own affairs as much as possible, and as soon as possible, so that the operation of the whole community could be turned over to the residents.

While construction of the community was the major cooperative venture, other instances of cooperative decision-making occurred, such as the proposal and selection of a suitable name for the community. Various names were suggested, including Friendsdale and Luzerne Gardens, but in August 1937, the group voted for Penn-Craft, combining the names of the first and last owners of the property.

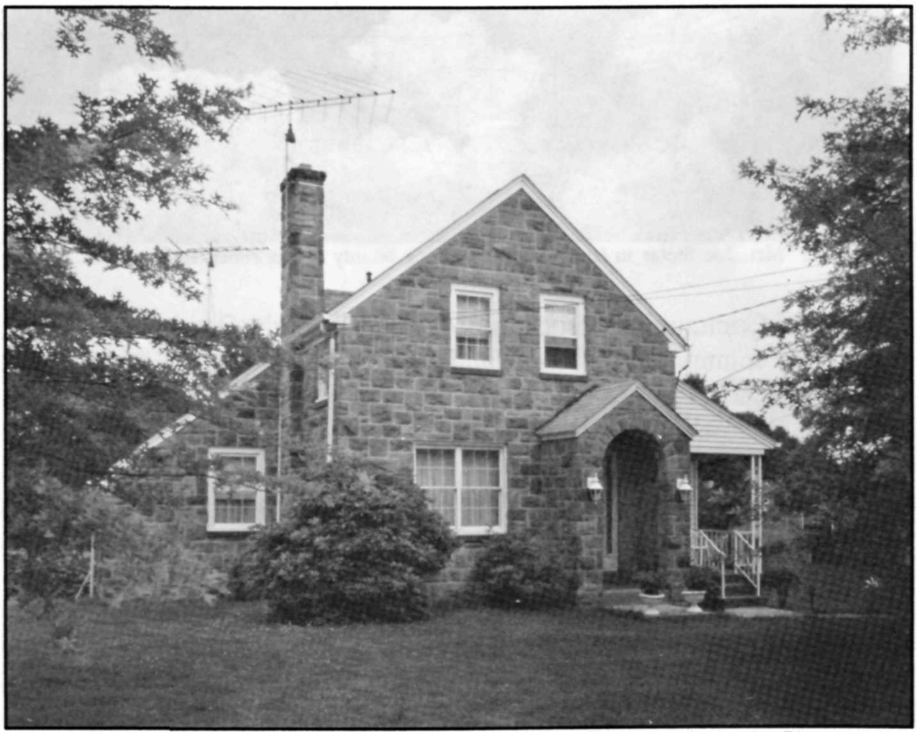

Figure 24 Billiani house, where stone walls were laid by hand, township road. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

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[36] Bona Billiani, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney at Penn-Craft, 21 June 1989.

[37] American Friends Service Committee, Lease agreement, photocopy in the possession of Louis Orslene, Fairbank, Pa.

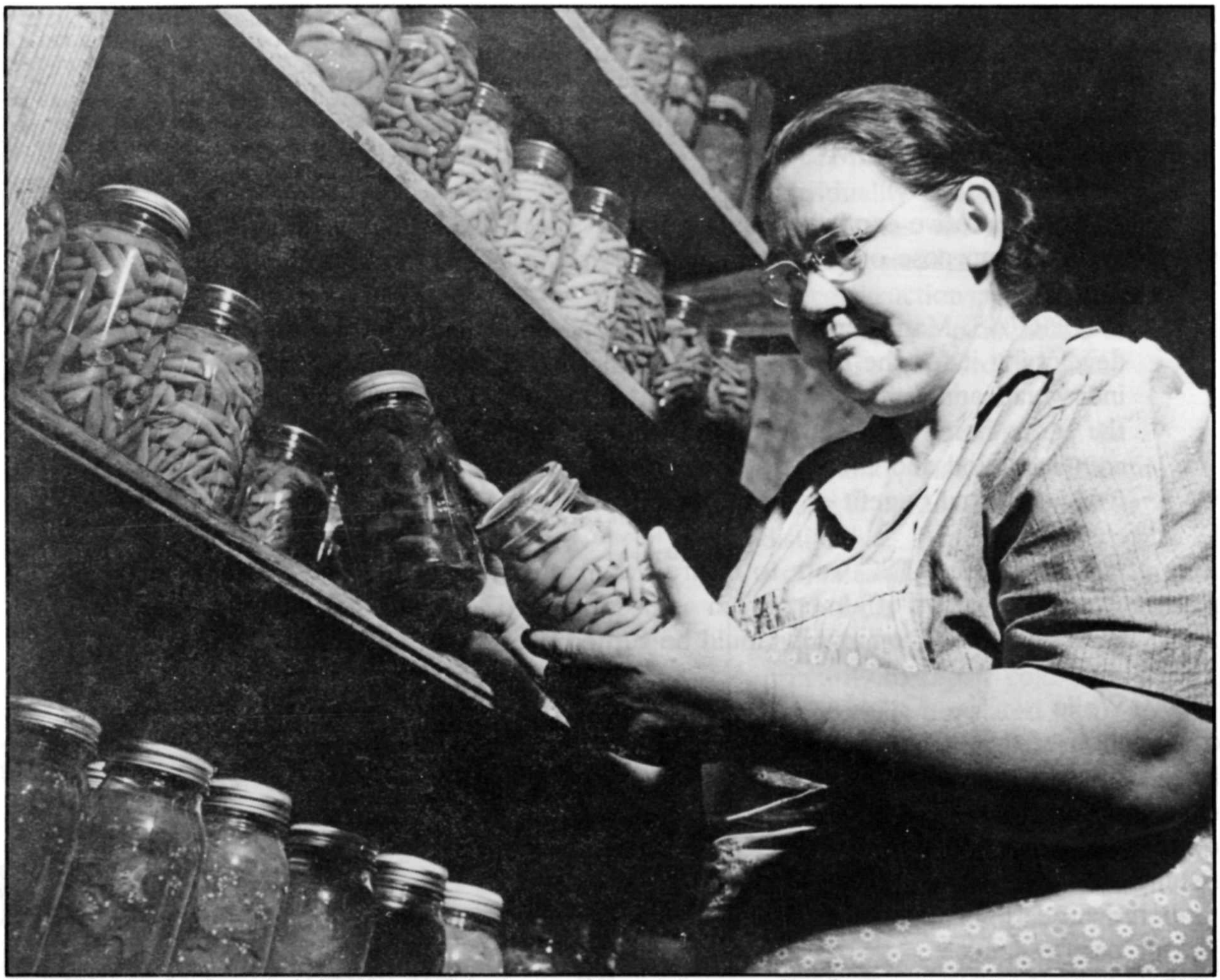

Figure 25 Mrs. Joe Stetar in fruit cellar, examining bounty of her subsistence garden. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

The Community Association, formed in early October 1937, institutionalized the cooperative community.[38] Each family had a voice through its two votes, generally belonging to the homesteader and his wife. A meeting was called once a month during the construction process to discuss any problems openly. Officers were elected regularly from the ranks of the homesteaders, with the three Friends--Day, Peckham, and Painter--serving as advisers and moderators. The other organizations that were created, such as the Mothers' Club, Library Committee, Work Committee, Religious Life Committee, Girls Club, and Boy Scouts, reported to the Community Association. In addition to these, the Friends established a community center in the old Craft farmhouse, where homesteaders could attend programs on farming, canning, nutrition, childcare, health practices, and engage in various social activities, such as dances and parties. Participation in these programs was not mandatory, but attendance was usually high.

While the AFSC actively promoted the formation of these committees and clubs, their success was due to the homesteaders' continued interest and enthusiasm. As the Monthly

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[38] David Day to Homer Morris, 30 June 1937, AFSC Archives.

Labor Review concluded, "There is hardly an activity for which provision has not been made." The Mothers' Club, for example, was organized by nurse Martha Landes in 1936 at the Orient mining patch to educate miners' wives about modern health-care practices. The Penn-Craft mothers sponsored a number of programs, including clothing drives and a nursery school, but their most important venture was the Well Baby Conference held in summer 1938. With the participation of several local doctors and several state nurses, the conference was an annual local event until the formation of a Tri-County organization, which took over administration of the program in 1946. The homesteaders also enjoyed The Penn-Craft, a monthly newsletter that began in May 1939 and reported on various events.[39]

Following the AFSC's lead, the homesteaders soon took it upon themselves to organize committees for their various needs: the Community Center Committee took care of the maintenance of the old Craft farmhouse; the Community Life Committee sponsored sports activities such as baseball; the Memorial Committee organized the construction of a community Honor Roll after the war; and the Religious Life Committee addressed the homesteaders' spiritual needs.

When the Friends started Penn-Craft they deliberately adopted a policy of non-interference in matters of religion. Most of the homesteaders belonged to local churches and were encouraged to continue their individual practices. A number of families, however, were unable to travel the distance between the project and their churches, and suggested to the field staff that some sort of religious group be organized at Penn-Craft. The Friends' response was to support the formation of a Religious Life Committee whose responsibility it was to organize Bible readings, discussions, and prayer meetings. When they heard this, several local churches fired off letters to the AFSC in Philadelphia, expressing their concern that the homesteaders were being led away from their churches by the Friends. Once reasssured that the Friends had

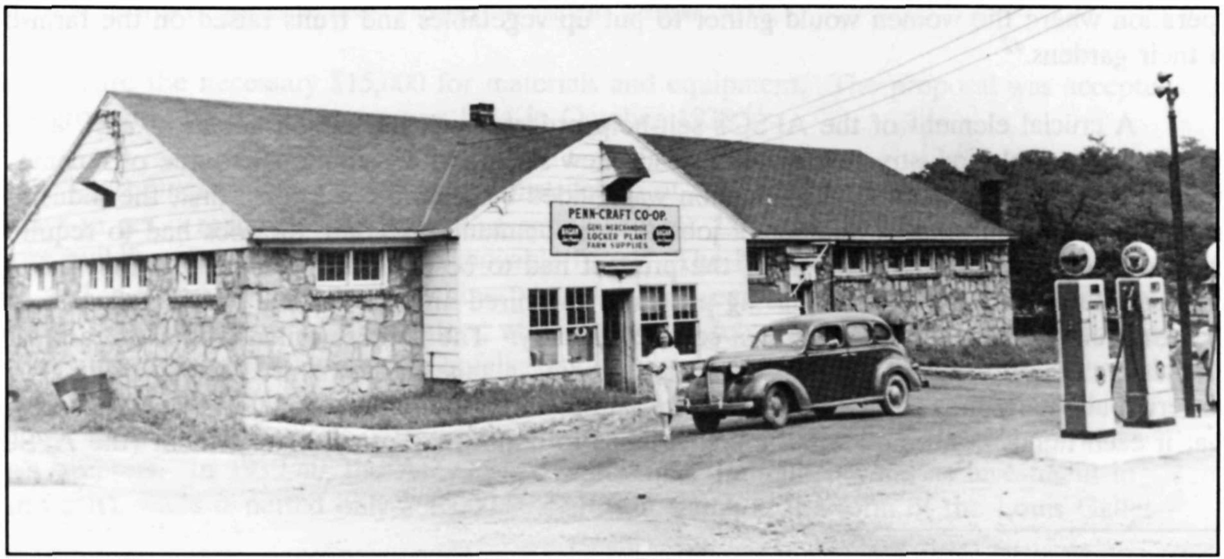

Figure 26 Cooperative store. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

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[39] "Self-Help Cooperative Housing," 572; Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary; The Penn-Craft, 1 (25 May 1939), in the possession of Rev. Thomas Logston.

no such aims, the religious meetings were able to continue without outside interference.[40]

Considerable care was taken by the Friends to assure that children, as well as adults, had plenty to do. Between 1940 and 1942, the Community Life Committee hired a recreational leader, Matt Wasko, to organize activities for the children during the summer. Having their children occupied and looked after during the day was a boon that enabled some mothers to work at the canning plant or factory. Older children often worked, too, whether at the factory, or picking tomatoes to be sent to the Heinz Company in Pittsburgh, or building houses.[41] Children also had Little League, Boy Scouts, and the Girls Club to keep them out of mischief. Dorothy Shaw Dankovich laughingly said that "a kid couldn't get into too much trouble, because you had fifty mothers, not just one."

Since the goal of the community was to promote a long-term self-help subsistence program, the AFSC also established a cooperative farm to supplement each homesteader's subsistence garden. The farm and its associated pasture lands occupied about 110 acres of land around the community and formed a buffer zone between Penn-Craft and other nearby towns. Here the miners were taught the rudiments of agriculture, such as plowing, planting, and livestock care. The homesteaders produced vegetables, grains, meat, eggs, butter, and milk, and sold them to local markets for a modest profit.

The produce was also sold in the cooperative store, which began in summer 1937 in a converted cowshed with $25 in capital. Since many of the men were still working part time in the mines, they continued to patronize nearby company stores. It therefore took several years to get the store on its feet financially, but by 1941 enough homesteaders had invested in it to allow the construction of a larger facility complete with Fayette County's first frozen-food locker plant. Attracting users from all over the county, the store--and frozen-food lockers--expanded in 1945. A cooperative venture, the store operated on the premise that each family who invested in it would receive a share of the profits. There was also a small canning operation where the women would gather to put up vegetables and fruits raised on the farm or in their gardens.[42]

A crucial element of the AFSC's self-help program was the establishment of an economically viable industry that would provide new skills and an additional source of income when the mines were down. The selection was guided by several conditions: first, the industry had to provide a substantial number of jobs to the community; second, the jobs had to require as little training as possible; and third, the product had to be easily marketable. At first the Friends intended to establish a weaving program, and hired an experienced weaver to move to the community and teach his craft as a cottage industry. The venture failed within a year. The Friends considered several other possibilities, including a shoe factory, shirt factory, and a pottery, but finally they settled on a sweater-manufacturing operation. The AFSC proposed that if each family contributed 100 hours of labor to build the factory, management (the AFSC)

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[40] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary; AFSC archives.

[41] Dorothy Dankovich, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 20 June 1989; Joe Shaw; J. C. Carp, Jr.

[42] Sheppard, 226; Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary.

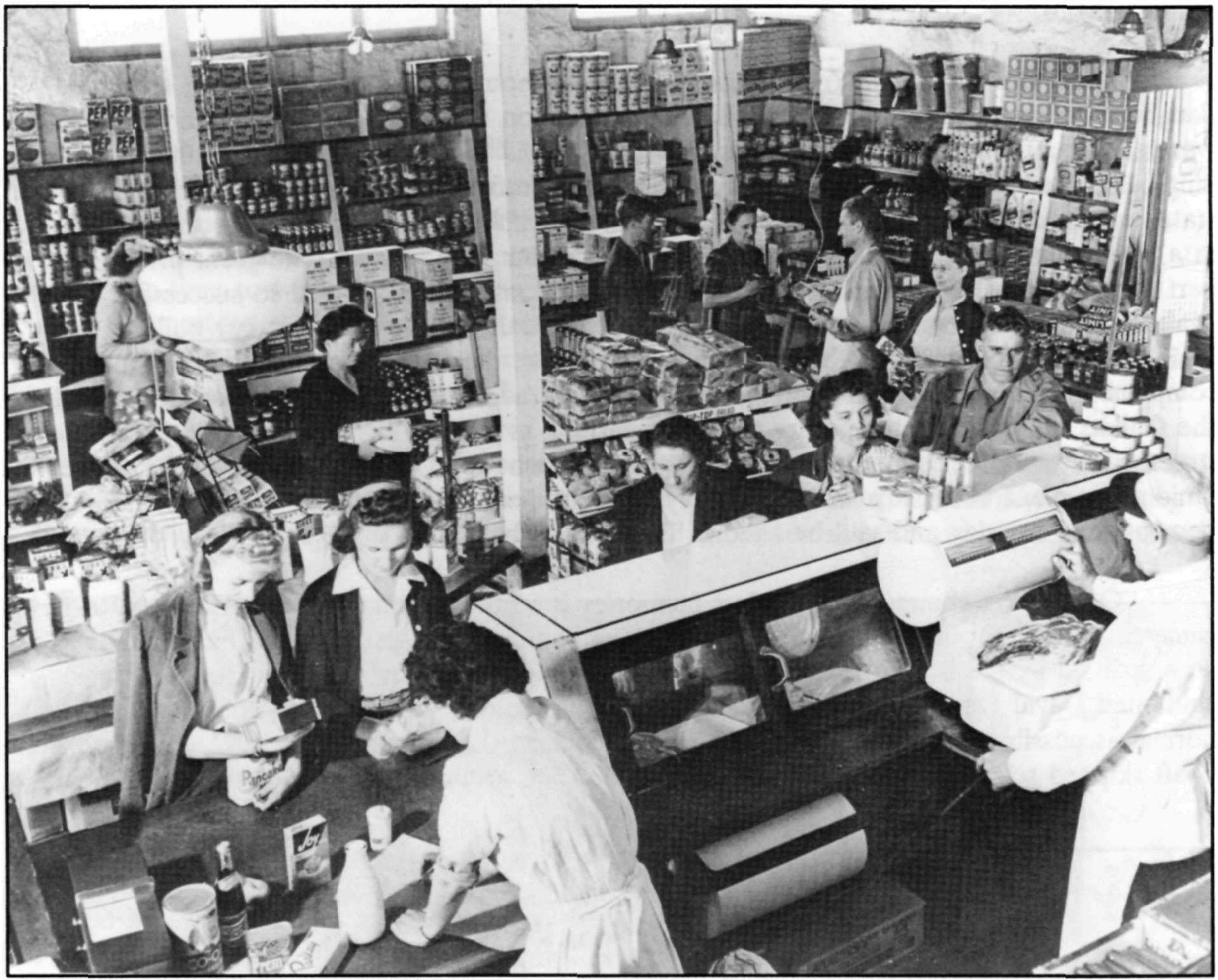

Figure 27 Interior of cooperative store. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

would secure the necessary $15,000 for materials and equipment. The proposal was accepted and a ground-breaking ceremony was held in October 1938.[43]

The homesteaders united in the construction of the factory, working Saturdays and holidays to get it ready in time to receive spring orders. Like the houses, the eight-bay stone factory building was constructed with movable forms. The building was completed in January 1939, and in six months knitting machines were in place, employees trained, and markets found. The first large shipment, 2,500 sweaters, was sent out in July. But just as the factory seemed to get on its feet, a series of problems befell the fledgling mill. The war effort caused local mines to reopen, taking many of Penn-Craft's newly trained men and boys away from the mill. In addition, the nationwide draft drastically reduced the market for the factory's chief product--men's sweaters. In 1939-40, the AFSC put $72,000 into the mill (beyond its investment in Penn-Craft), while it netted only $56,000.[44] Salvation came in the form of the Louis Gallet

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[43] Richardson, 35; Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary.

[44] AFSC, Annual Report 1939: 36-37; 1940: 52-53.

Knitting Mills.[45]

Louis Gallet, a New York native, trained the homesteaders' wives, young sons, and daughters to operate the knitting machines. Production remained steady enough throughout the war years to prompt an addition to the factory in 1945.[46] By 1947 the mill reached a peak employment of ninety-six persons drawn from Penn-Craft and other nearby communities. Gallet stated in the community's tenth anniversary yearbook, "We believe that this factory contributed in a small share to the success of this progressive community and we take great pride in being a part of the Penn-Craft community." Eventually, the knitting mill proved so successful that it again outgrew the Penn-Craft facility, and when the Gallets moved to a larger building in Uniontown in 1953, most of the employees stayed with them, traveling back and forth on a complimentary bus. Like many of the young homesteaders, J. C. Carp, Jr., started working for the Gallets in 1941 as a temporary means of earning money. The "temporary job" eventually stretched into thirty-four years and a factory superintendency. Gallet's widow still manages the Uniontown plant and, Carp said, the family's commitment to Penn-Craft was such that, "If a person went in today and said he lived in Penn-Craft, he'd have a job right away."[47]

One of the community's fondest memories is of the day in 1937 that Eleanor Roosevelt came to call. En route from Arthurdale to Westmoreland Homesteads, the First Lady was accompanied by Doris Duke, and her visit was intended to be low key. Homer Morris cautioned David Day that only a few families were to be notified in order to keep things as normal as possible. Word leaked out, however, and on the appointed day, every child in Penn-Craft skipped school to follow the big, black limousine around the community. The Friends, already planning an addition to the project, especially hoped that Duke would be impressed enough to make a donation, and were probably disappointed when she did not. Duke nevertheless made quite an impression; as she made her way through the streets, a white-gloved assistant handed out brand-new $5 bills to the children.

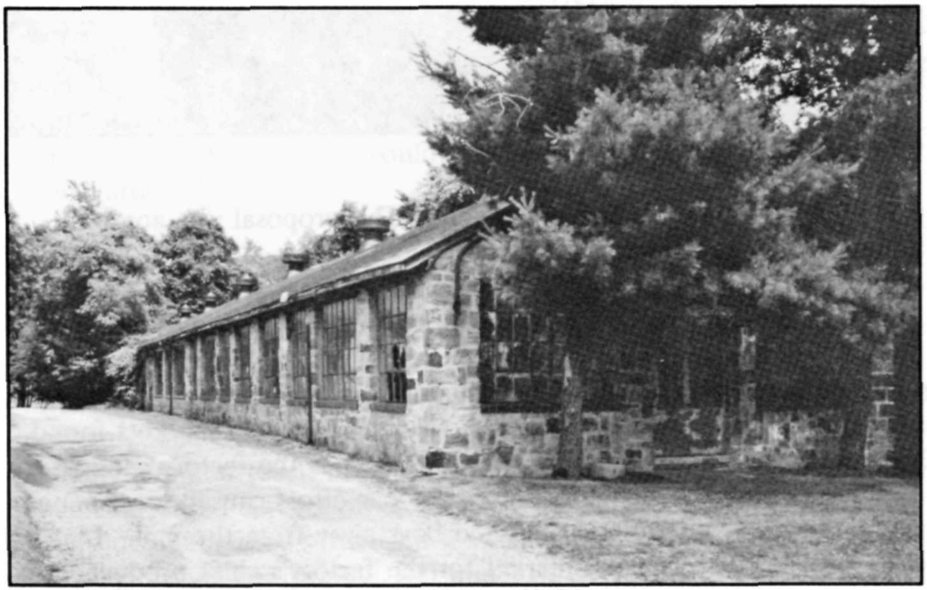

Figure 28 Knitting mill. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

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[45] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary; Orslene and Shearer.

[46] AFSC, Annual Report 1945: 15.

[47] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary; J. C. Carp, Jr.

COMPLETION AND CONTINUITY

Construction and occupation of all fifty stone houses were supposed to be accomplished by October 1941 but the effects of the war extended the date to 1942. With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, the coal mines began to go back into operation, providing employment to Penn-Craft residents, but slowing completion of their homes. Although homesteaders no longer had the time to work on their houses, they had the money to pay off their loans. By 1945, three homesteaders had completely paid for their houses, while thirty-nine others had advanced payments on their loans.[48] Although most of the houses were occupied by 1942, some of the homesteaders continued to do finishing work for a number of years.

One measure of Penn-Craft's popularity is that it was expanded after the war. In 1946 the Friends began Phase II, the construction of fifteen ten-acre homesteads on adjacent land. The changes made here point to some of the perceived successes and failures of Phase I. Self-

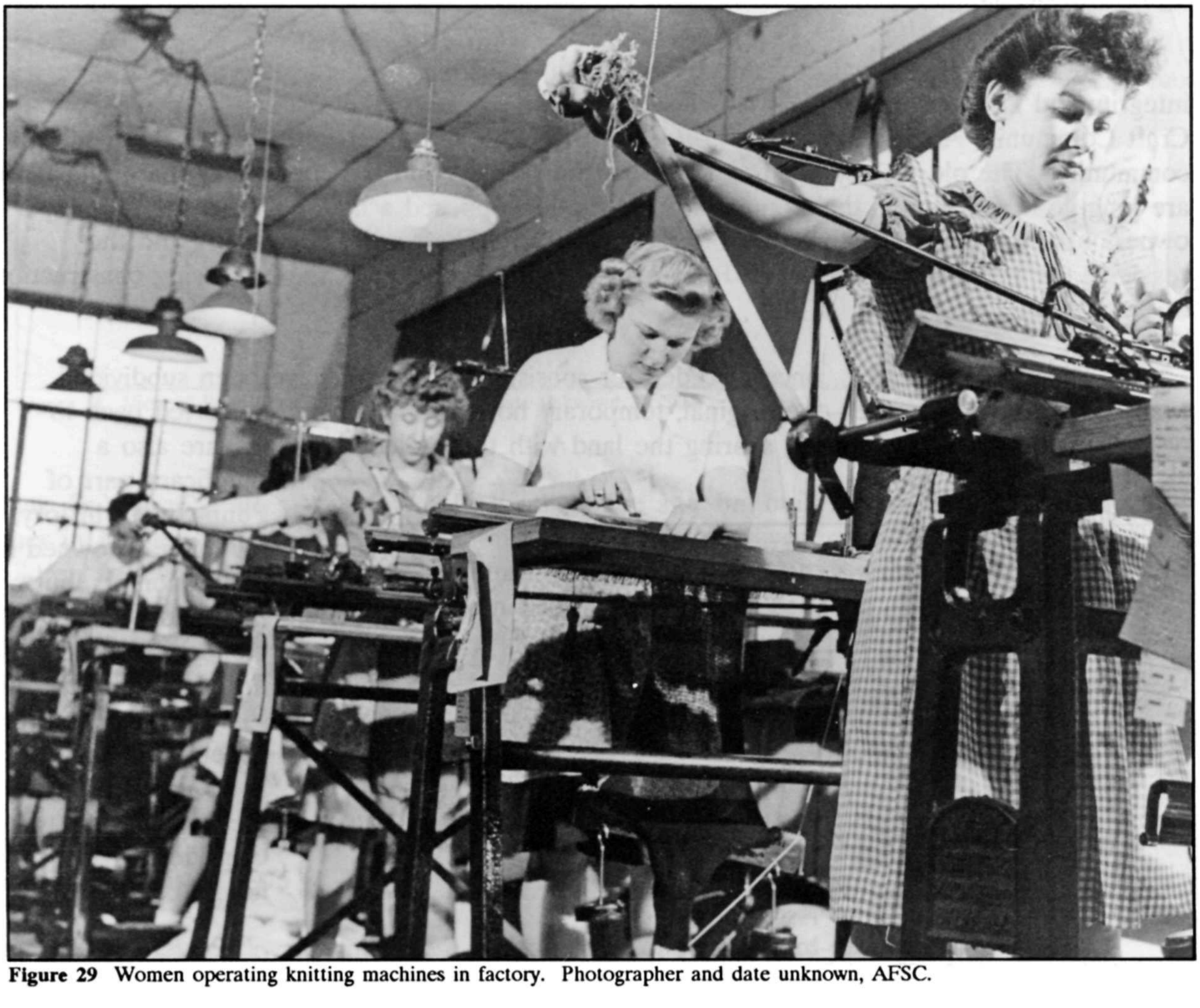

Figure 29 Women operating knitting machines in factory. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

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[48] AFSC, Annual Report 1945: 15.

help construction, a key to keeping costs down, was again the foundation of the Phase II project.

The increased acreage provided greater flexibility and "greater economic security." The homesteaders were encouraged to retain the land as pasture until more intensive farming was needed. Designs for the houses were drawn from the Farm Security Administration publication Small Houses, thus eliminating the need for an architect.[49] Construction material was cinder-block, not stone, although the homesteaders made their own cinder blocks. Half of the Phase II families were headed by returning servicemen, and many homesteaders were the sons and daughters of Phase I residents.

The financing was considerably different. Again, U.S. Steel made a major contribution, but the AFSC viewed Phase II as a more immediate revolving loan project. All of the project costs were factored into the cost of the units; each cost about $3,000. Homesteaders were required to provide a downpayment of $500 and take out a loan of $2,500 at 4 percent interest from the AFSC. After a year, the homesteaders would refinance with a bank, repaying the AFSC's investment.[50]

Today in the original portion of Penn-Craft, the stone houses retain much of their integrity and many of the original families--if not the original homesteaders--keep the Penn-Craft Community Association active. But signs of change are interspersed throughout the community. The old factory building has fallen into decay, and the cooperative barn and farm are long gone. Recently, the Community Association opposed a liquor license for the new owners of the Penn-Craft store; the Friends made Penn-Craft a dry community and the residents want to keep it that way. But the most notable change is the increasing construction of new homes.

The large house lots, once intended for subsistence gardens, have been subdivided. Many of the poultry houses--the original, temporary housing--have been converted back to permanent homes. New houses, sharing the land with these older buildings, are also a significant part of Penn-Craft's history, for they are owned not by newcomers, but by the children and grandchildren of those first fifty families. In some instances, several generations have maintained their ties to the family homestead. Consider original homesteader Joseph

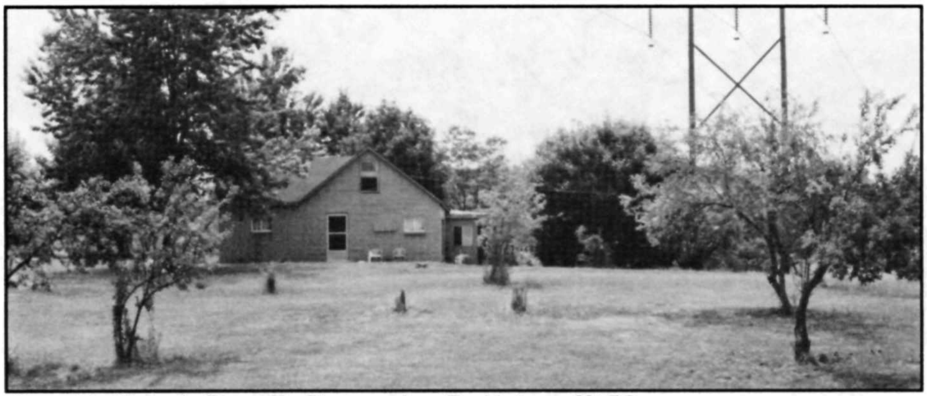
Figure 30 House in Phase II. Photographer: David Ames, HABS.

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[49] Bulletin 896, 41, 42.

[50] Sheppard, 228; Bulletin 896, 43.

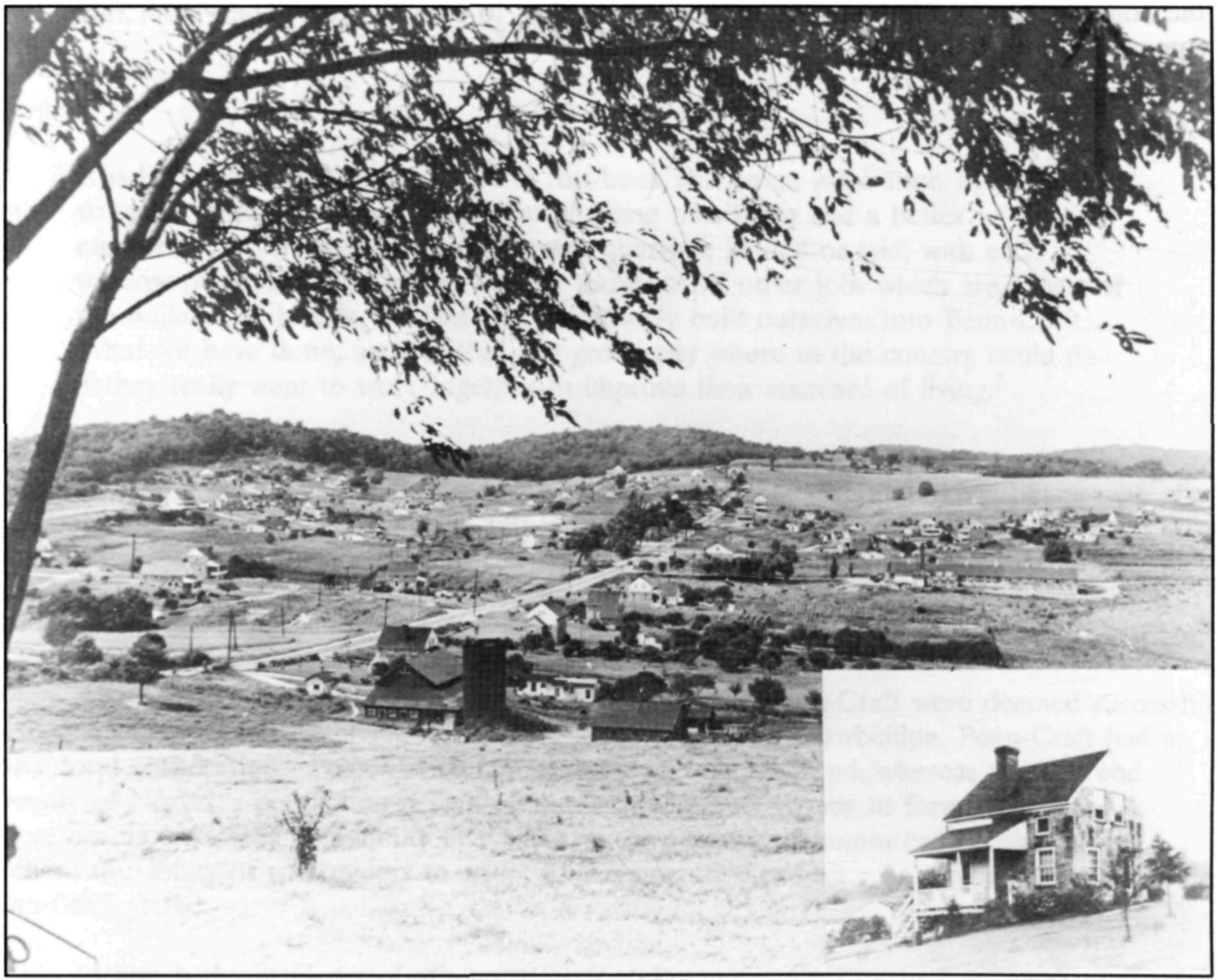

Figure 31 View of Penn-Craft. Photographer and date unknown, AFSC.

Shaw, Sr.'s, family: after World War II, brothers Joe and Jim built houses next door to each other in Phase II; their sister Dorothy Shaw Dankovich also lives in Phase II, as do her two children and Jim's son Francis. Alice Shaw Illig, who married into another homesteader family, now lives in the St. Clair family's stone house in Phase I; her daughter and son-in-law built a new house on the same property. Virginia Shaw Balog lives in the stone house her father built; sister Charlotte Shaw Orslene owns the Shaw temporary house, now occupied by daughter Kathleen Orslene Groves. Then there are the Carps: J. C. Carp, Jr., lives in the remodeled temporary house, which he has covered with Perma-Stone in imitation of the stone house occupied by his son Jay. Similarly, Bona Billiani moved into her remodeled temporary house so that son Gene and his family could have her stone house. Rev. Thomas Logston returned to Penn-Craft in 1964 after graduate school, intending to buy his father's homestead, but was too late; undaunted, in 1975 he bought the next stone house in Penn-Craft to come on the market.

The staunch loyalty that these and other second- and third-generation families demonstrate is as much a characteristic of Penn-Craft as the stone houses. But unlike the continuity of architecture, the continuity of people is an indication that the "social roots" that the homesteaders planted have blossomed. According to one resident, "The Penn-Craft community is alive and well."[51]

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[51] Robert Jameson, interviewed by Margaret M. Mulrooney, 20 June 1989.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

> It is hoped that our story as told in this book will be an inspiration to all who strive to achieve the American ideal of home ownership and a better environment. With each stone that was quarried, hauled or laid; with each window frame that was made; with all the hosts of other jobs which are a part of the building of homes, we feel that we literally built ourselves into Penn-Craft... What we have done, we feel that any group any where in the country could do if they really want to work together to improve their standard of living.[1]

Norvelt and Penn-Craft, both located in the Connellsville coke region, were visionary responses to dire economic conditions. Norvelt was a government undertaking, begun with all the idealism of the New Deal. Penn-Craft was a private group's response, determined that they could do it better without government red tape. Trading on the government's experience, the American Friends Service Committee kept Penn-Craft small, one-fifth the size of Norvelt; its fifty families were hand-picked and easily governed.

As an experiment in social reform, both Norvelt and Penn-Craft were deemed successful by their backers. Unlike Norvelt, where local corporations were forbidden, Penn-Craft had an active local corporation. Penn-Craft's families were closely observed, whereas the size and diversity of Norvelt's population permitted numerous interest groups to form. The homesteaders embraced community life, much to the surprise of homestead officials who doubted the ability of coal miners to adapt to a cooperative project. As a researcher evaluating Penn-Craft stated:

> Although the residents of mining patches and company coal towns live closely together, they are about as devoid of social and community activities as any group of people can be. Coal miners outside of their union activities have little experience in group community life or in democratic processes of self government. They have not had the kind of experience which enables them to fit easily into a community which is trying to use the democratic process as a means of community education.[2]

While it is true that residents of coal towns were typically denied the right to "democratic processes of self government," miners and their families nevertheless participated in a wide range of activities--some company-sponsored, some not--that fostered a deep-rooted sense of community identity. The development of community awareness was also aided by the miners' common experience within the coal-company town system.[3] Although the image of the independent miner prevailed, miners and their families were quite accustomed to helping each other out, whether down in the mine or above ground in the patch. Evidently unaware of the extent to which miners and their families interacted, various sociologists and evaluators were pleased by the relative ease with which the homesteaders adapted to cooperative life.

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[1] Penn-Craft Tenth Year Anniversary, 1937-1947 (Penn-Craft, privately printed, 1947).

[2] Frederick L. W. Richardson, Jr., "Community Resettlement in a Depressed Coal Region," Applied Anthropology (October-December 1941): 30.

If imitation is the measure of success for an experimental program, then the subsistence homesteads fell short. Not only was the experiment not repeated, but due to an abrupt change in the economic climate, several aspects of the existing homestead programs were terminated or incompletely developed. When, less than ten years after the homestead program was initiated, America went to war, the depression economy became a boom economy. Coal mines were re-opened, coke plants re-fired, and the region experienced a modest prosperity. In a climate of rising expectations, the tenuous existence that the subsistence homesteads could provide was no longer enough.

The more radical elements of the subsistence homesteads were the first to fade. The industrial and agricultural cooperatives at both Norvelt and Penn-Craft became private enterprises. Part-time farming was replaced by full-time employment. The farming aspect of the subsistence homesteads was also apparently one of the least appealing to the homesteaders; one evaluator noted "friction arising from the attempt to impose a subsistence pattern of living."[4] The subsistence homestead today is rarely that; the generous acreage is only occasionally, and partially, farmed for home consumption. One aspect of the program that was imitated--self-help construction--did not last beyond the construction phase. The AFSC promoted self-help construction more than the government, which decided against using it for the remainder of the subsistence homesteads.

The subsistence homesteads were effective as relief projects, providing short-term assistance to the impoverished, but they failed to elevate the truly destitute from relief-roll reliance. Within a year of the program's founding, the division's annual report noted that "the principal responsibility" was "to assist families who are on an economic level above that of the sheer relief group." In the federal program, the sale price of the houses was set at a level attainable for a homesteader with an $850 annual cash income, but by 1942 one evaluator insisted that purchasers needed an income of $1,200 or more, which put them in the lower middle-income group.[5] Homesteaders with an income of less than that required ongoing subsidy.

Whether these houses were provided at a low cost is a matter of debate. The AFSC claimed that self-help construction enabled the Penn-Craft houses to be built at a low cost,[6] ignoring the fact that more than one-third of the cost of the houses was subsidized. Two-thirds of the cost of the Norvelt houses was subsidized, however, even though those houses were also built by their future owners. More expensive designs, cash payments for homesteaders' labor, and bureaucratic complications added to their cost.

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[3] See Margaret M. Mulrooney, A Legacy of Coal: The Coal Company Towns of Southwestern Pennsylvania (Washington, D. C.: National Park Service, HABS/HAER Division, 1989).

[4] Russell Lord and Paul H. Johnstone, A Place on Earth: A Critical Appraisal of Subsistence Homesteads (Washington: Department of Agriculture, 1942), 181.

[5] Lord and Johnstone, 49, 179.

[6] American Friends Service Committee, "Evaluation of Experiences at Penn-Craft during Three-Year Period 1937-1940," 10.

Environmental reform was one of the more intriguing aspects of the program. Through the 1930s, the government continued to build planned communities, profiting in some cases from its experience with the subsistence-homestead communities. Norris, Tennessee, was one of the more notable, built in 1935-37. The Division of Subsistence Homesteads funded one-third of its $2.1 million cost, while the remainder came from the Tennessee Valley Authority. Norris's houses and roads blended with the topography, there were ample open areas, and the town was surrounded by a greenbelt.[7] Beginning in 1935, the Resettlement Administration constructed three greenbelt towns, hailed as the most significant undertaking of the New Deal, in terms of community building. Viewed as the culmination of the garden-city movement in America, the greenbelt towns were built on the fringes of metropolitan areas as complete communities, with streets, schools, playgrounds, and housing. In their farms, forests, and planned open spaces--much of it contained in a protective "green belt"--the new towns maintained a rural feel. Like the subsistence-homestead communities, these government-built expressions of the garden-city movement were part of a planning continuum that resulted in Federal Housing Administration policies--policies that affected the appearance of the suburban landscape of the 1940s and '50s.[8]

The plan for the subsistence homes incorporated several features that are valued today: a layout that respects the landscape; variation in layout and in individual designs; inclusion of features of indigenous architecture; use of local materials; and provision of modern conveniences. The differences between the houses in the two towns reveal the decisions the designers faced. The houses at Norvelt had large kitchens, permitting a dining space within, as the company houses had, and bathrooms on the second floor in about half of the houses. Penn-Craft chose less expensive alternatives, of a small kitchen and combined living/dining room, and bathroom on the first floor, but the stone construction of the houses gave them a substantial appearance. Penn-Craft houses were slightly smaller overall, with the six-room L-plan house having about 750 square feet of interior space, compared to Norvelt's 837 square feet (Type 601). The Penn-Craft kitchens were half the size of those at Norvelt, while the living rooms were about the same. But both Penn-Craft and Norvelt houses were larger than the company-provided housing in the area; a four-room unit in a double house at Star Junction, in Fayette County, had about 710 square feet of space.[9]

Although the construction costs were not as low as desired in either community, this struggle between appealing design and affordable housing is one that continues to plague housing advocates today. The subsistence homesteads of Penn-Craft and Norvelt constituted a bold attempt to provide housing that would inspire pride in the community. The compact plans, inclusion of modern conveniences, and the picturesque semi-rural settings resulted in the development of an innovative small-house architecture. The contribution of subsistence-homestead communities of the 1930s lies in this attempt at environmental change as well as their vision of social reform.

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[7] Herbert L. Harper, "National Register Nomination: Norris District" (National Park Service, 1975). Paul Conkin denied that the Division of Subsistence Homesteads provided any of the financing. Paul K. Conkin, Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 113.

[8] Conkin, 305; Marc A. Weiss, "Developing and Financing the 'Garden Metropolis': Urban Planning and Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America," Planning Perspectives 5 (1990): 307.

[9] Mulrooney, 40.

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★U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1991-302-713/50275